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ABSTRACT

The school experiences of African American male inmates are explored. Nine African American male inmates, ranging in age from 21 to 55, were interviewed regarding their schooling experiences. Interviews were recorded and transcribed to create a text, and themes were uncovered. Themes that describe their schooling experiences were identified. Four themes were: (1) "We don't like being embarrassed"; (2) "Feelin' like we're on the outside peepin' in"; (3) "We want to be cared about"; and (4) "They were afraid of us, and we were afraid of them." The final theme drew the preceding four into an essential understanding of the lived experience of these inmates: "It just couldn't have been our school." This was a phrase used by one participant as he described his experiences at a predominantly Hispanic school. These inmates felt that they did not belong to their schools, and the schools did not belong to them. What was learned from the inmates is summarized in the final chapter and areas for additional research are suggested. (Contains 160 references.) (SLD)

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It Just Couldn't Have Been Our School: A Phenomenological Study of the Schooling Experiences of African American Male Inmates

ED 426 139

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
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Jerry McClelland, Advisor

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Abstract

This phenomenological study addresses the following question: What are the school experiences of African American male inmates like? Nine African American male inmates were interviewed regarding their schooling experiences. Interviews were recorded and transcribed to create a text, and then themes were uncovered. Five themes which describe their schooling experiences were: We don't like being embarrassed, Feelin' like we're on the outside peeping in, We want to be cared about, and They were afraid of us and we were afraid of them. The final theme drew the preceding ones into an essential understanding of the lived experience: "It just couldn't have been our school." The final chapter presents what was learned by the researcher from the inmates and questions and issues that suggest additional research.

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Chapter One

Coming to Research African American Males

This study examines the educational experiences of a segment of Americans that face distinctive problems in school and society: African American males. Our society is so deeply ambivalent about African American males that they are alternately dehumanized (remember the slave), revered (remember the athlete), ignored (remember the infant), imitated (remember the musician), desired (remember the lover) and despised (remember the criminal). These boys and men face nearly overwhelming odds against living a full, meaningful, and long life.

The barriers and pitfalls African American males face are reflected in their over representation in troubling categories. A disproportionately high number of them experience infant mortality, special education, illiteracy, poverty, school suspensions, school dropout, juvenile and adult arrest, homicide, incarceration and unemployment. These brothers face insurmountable obstacles. We turn to a closer look at their presence in schools and prisons.

Too Little School, Too Much Incarceration

African American males are less likely to thrive in school than their European American counterparts. Conversely, they are more likely to be incarcerated.

School Troubles

African American youth account for a disproportionately high number of school problems and low academic achievement. African Americans constitute 12% of the American population. According to a recent report by the Children's Defense Fund

(1996), each day 444 African American youth between the ages of 16 and 24 drop out of school, while 1,689 European American youth do. One thousand one-hundred ninety-eight African American youth are corporally punished, while 1,639 white youth are. Four thousand four hundred four are suspended, while 6,674 white youth are. Conciatore (1989) and Garibaldi (1992) also reported that African American males experience disproportionately higher rates of suspension, expulsion, and discipline in school.

In Minnesota 59% of reported school suspensions involved urban African American boys and girls who make up only 26% of student enrollment of the state's urban schools (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 1996). The same report showed that African American students were suspended at three times the rate of white students. Why are they more likely to be suspended?

Poda (1992) analyzed the cause of African Americans' suspensions from the Milwaukee Public Schools. He concluded that 85% of the suspensions were for nonviolent behaviors like not following instructions, not having books, refusing to do homework and similar violations. Were these youth aware of the norms and expectations? Were they unable or unwilling to comply with school expectations? Did they believe they were complying, but teachers did not? Were these behaviors acts of resistance against norms and expectations? Students who made threats, assaults, and harassment accounted for 11% of the suspensions. What do these suspensions mean to the students and the schools? What are their consequences?

Other researchers (Foster, 1976; Hanna, 1984; Mancini, 1981) have found that a large number of African American male students are suspended for culture specific

behaviors including playing the dozens, rapping, wearing sagging pants, and wearing hats backwards. They further found that these African American youth are also more likely to challenge a teacher if they feel that they have been disrespected. Are these acts of defiance or just teens doing what teens do? Are these suspensions a result of culture? Why do youth display these behaviors at school?

A study (Garibaldi, 1991) conducted in New Orleans in 1987 on the educational status of African American males found that they were disproportionately represented in almost all categories of academic failure. Eight hundred seventeen out of a total of 1470 first graders who failed to be promoted to the second grade during the 1986-87 school year were young African American males. Failure starts early for these children and haunts them until they leave school.

Hare (1987) explains academic failure of African American youth from his study of ethnic group identity. For the youth who identify failure and negative experiences with school, there is a tendency to shift from seeking support from school to seeking support from peers. If school-related issues constantly reduce self esteem, there is a human tendency to turn to more esteem-building activities. Hare believes that youth who seek support from peers tend to view popularity, sports, and sexual activities as most important, and although they receive short-term approval from their peers, there is a danger of long-term, negative consequences. Such negative consequences manifest themselves with an increase of crime and teen pregnancy. Hare views this situation as school-system induced, and it results in loss of legitimate job opportunities for African American youth. He believes that their situation is a result of negative schooling

experiences, generally caused by incompetent teachers and little to no parental control. Hare contends that these youth are vulnerable to a peer culture that provides positive responses to counterproductive behaviors that increase their egos.

In a study that analyzed African American males' responses to schooling, Polite (1994) concluded that many of them were poorly educated and were not prepared for postsecondary education. The school dropouts in his study were prone to in-school truancy, engaging in a drug sub-culture, and exhibiting aggressive tendencies. Polite also stated the youths felt that there was a lack of caring from both white and African American teachers.

Corporal punishment, suspensions, dropout rates, and academic failure sketch a bleak future for a large number of young African American males. Without adequate education and skills they are unable to find meaningful, well-paying, career-oriented jobs. A large number of them are selecting illegitimate sources of incomes instead (Majors & Gordon, 1994).

Kozol (1991) suggests a startling relationship between school failure and incarceration. He found that the Office of School Safety in the New York City Schools purchased two sets of handcuffs for each of their 1,000 schools. His stinging assessment was that, "handcuffs . . . may be better preparation than we realize for the lives that many of these adolescent kids will lead" (p. 118). Handcuffs at school create a strong image linking schools and the criminal justice system.

Incarceration

African American males are incarcerated at disproportionately high rates. In 1983, even though they represented only 6% of the population, they represented 43% of the federal and state prisoner population in the United States (Garibaldi, 1991). In 1990, the number of African American men under the criminal justice system exceeded the number of them enrolled in college (Mauer, 1990). In 1995, African American males represented 49% of the federal and state prisoner population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1995).

African Americans constitute less than 2% of the population in the state of Minnesota. Yet according to the Minnesota Supreme Court Task Force (1993) on Racial Bias in the Judicial System (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 1993), Minnesota has the highest rate of incarceration per capita of African Americans in the nation. Within the State's correctional system, 21% of all juvenile inmates, and 34% of all adult inmates are African American males (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 1996).

While education neither causes nor prevents incarceration, I'm mindful that failure to complete high school lessens a child's positive life options. Most inmates have not completed high school, and only a small percentage have completed college (Halasz, 1993). In New York City, 90% of the male inmates of the city prisons are dropouts of the city's public schools (Kozol, 1991). In Minnesota, 38% of all adult correctional inmates are school dropouts (Minnesota Department of Corrections, 1996). Even in corrections education classes, African American males constitute a disproportionately large number

of literacy and GED students. This discussion regarding African American males provides some insight into their school troubles. However, by no means is it suggesting that schooling alone is responsible for their problems.

Formulating the Research Question

As I considered what research topic to select for my dissertation, I knew that the research should focus on those experiencing severe problems in school and on something I care deeply about and know about. I decided that there is a clear need to focus research on the educational experiences of African American males.

The following questions recurred to me as I read and thought about these brothers. Why are African American males disproportionately represented among dropouts, school suspensions, and special education classes? What are their schools like? What type of schools do they attend? What is school like for these individuals? What are their relationships with teachers and friends like? How are they treated and what do they learn about themselves and others? What lasting lessons about life do they learn in school? What does going to school mean to them? What are the roles of their parents, communities, and teachers in influencing their academic achievement? How do existing stereotypes of African American males affect their academic achievement? And, do their educational experiences in correctional facilities mirror those in other places?

Inmates were selected for the study because of the large percentage of them who are school dropouts. I reasoned that they were likely to have been less successful in and less well served by schools. What kinds of stories would men whose paths lead to prison tell about friends, teachers, and learning at school? Perhaps they can tell us about school

as we seldom hear it. What is it like to be punished, excluded, and suspended? What is special education like? Perhaps they can tell us how they and their friends thought about succeeding and failing in school. They might have had limiting socioeconomic backgrounds. They might have sought positive support from their peers rather than school. Perhaps their parents were not actively involved in their education. We can learn much from African American males about school if we pause to listen to their experiences.

The research question I settled on for this study is: What are the school experiences of African American male inmates like? The purpose of the study is to gain a deep insight into their lived experiences in schools.

Coming to Care about African American Males in Schools

My understanding of African American males is based on having an African American male child, a father, brothers, and nephews. I have observed the constraints placed upon them due to the combination of their race and gender. Fortunately, they have had successful educational outcomes. My understanding of African American males is also based on my experiences in attending school and church with them, teaching them in Sunday school, living around them, and my personal relationships with them. I have also taught African American males in secondary, postsecondary, and correctional facilities. But, I am interested in the lived educational experiences of all African American males from different segments of society.

As we consider the outcomes we want for our youth and their subsequent contributions to our society, I believe we must place a high priority on education. I

believe that the philosophy of educators should be consistent across all students in that we must have high expectations for everyone. We must equip African American males with the tools to graduate from high school. We must prepare them to pursue higher educational opportunities or good jobs in the workforce. They can be contributing members to society as good citizens, workers and family members. But to prepare African American males for these roles effectively, we must care about them and their lives. I recount here how I have come to care about their schooling.

Being the Mother of an African American Male Child

My son was born at 1:47 p.m. on a Thursday. The next day, I was allowed to hold him. Immediately, a strong feeling of overwhelming love connected us, and I felt compelled to protect him for the rest of his life. It was at that very moment that I decided to complete my bachelor's degree before he started the first grade. I said softly and confidently, "I will work hard to provide a good life for you." He moved as if he understood. His grey eyes sparkled. "This is a special baby," I thought. He was perfect to me. He was beautiful. Fifteen years later, he is still mama's baby. The connection and love between him and me originating at childbirth have never been broken. He is a well-rounded young man, who is concerned about the welfare of others.

I wish I could allow him to be more carefree--carefree to the extent to which white teenage boys are allowed to be. But, I'm afraid to let go. He and I have had many conversations about my being too protective. Sometimes he doesn't think that I trust him, but I explain that I trust him completely. It is the rest of the world that I do not trust with him. He isn't aware of how the rest of the world views him, and explaining that to him

will be very painful. Perhaps that is the reason that I delayed the conversation about how society views African American males. It is the world's problem, yet the world could make it his problem. I'm proud that he is developing normally, growing, and maturing. But, I am afraid--afraid that his height and voice changes are problematic for other people. How will they treat him as they come to view him as an African American male teenager?

My Son Being Labeled "Monkey-Like"

As I have observed my son's reactions to various situations and shared his joys and disappointments, I have closely analyzed his experiences in school and their relationship to personal ideologies of teachers and other particular aspects of society. Before he started public school, I told him that if anyone said anything to make him feel bad, he should tell me so that I could help him deal with it. I became more sensitive to the educational experiences of African American males because of an episode involving him in school.

My son attended a rural, public school in Alabama, the same one that I attended for 12 years. When he was 11 or 12 years old, he started a conversation with me about Mrs. Flowers, his teacher, confusing him about God. When I questioned him further, it seemed that he understood some of her views to be entirely different from those that we believe within our church. Even though I thought that I had helped to reduce the concern he felt over the religious misunderstandings, he continued to talk. Here is my recollection of the rest of the conversation that took place:

My son: (Pacing in front of and watching me as I watched TV) Ma, what does monkey-like mean?

Me: (Immediately feeling anger and attempting to suppress my feelings) Well, it could have different meanings to different people. Where did you hear that?

My son: Mrs. Flowers told me in front of the whole class to stop acting monkey-like, and I don't know why she said that to me, because the whole class was laughing and acting up, but she just picked me out of everybody else and said that.

Me: (Really angry now and still attempting to hide my true feelings). How did that make you feel?

My son: Well, I felt bad. Is that a racism word? When she said that, I felt like it meant something bad, because she was kind of laughing too when she said it.

Me: It was normal for you to feel like that. She should not have used that word to you. As far as I know, that word was used to imply that black people look and act like apes in a jungle. Many people would find it racist. Did you ask her why she said that to you?

My son: Yea. I told her that I wasn't the only person laughing so why was she talking to me. You can ask Rodd (his white friend) or anybody else. We were all wondering why she said that to me.

I felt my stomach ache with a strange sickness. He lowered his head, indicating shame as he told me this story and frowned as he mentioned the teacher's name, indicating anger. I shared his humiliation, anger and mistrust of his teacher. The term monkey-like implies uncivilized or primitive acts. To tell my son not to act like a monkey was to suggest that he was not fully human, that he was sub-human. We see in this offhand remark deeply ingrained racism thrust upon an 11 year old African American male by a white teacher. Even if children do not understand the subtle meanings or the

origins of such phrases, they understand when words are denigrating, especially when they are said with sarcasm.

I met with the principal and objected to the monkey-like statement. That meeting was followed by another, this time including Mrs. Flowers. I was presented with a series of disciplinary problems about my son which had not been brought to my attention until I complained about Mrs. Flowers' racist comment. The principal and Mrs. Flowers laughed and poked fun at my disagreement with their unprofessional conduct. Mrs. Flowers informed me that she was tenured, which I interpreted to mean that she was immune to my complaint. Our discussion was wide ranging and included my noting my expectation that my son would attend college. She told me that my son did not need to go to college. This story is indicative of how teacher expectations may be formed about African American students prior to teachers getting to know them and despite children's potential. I became much more aware of parents' inability to and their fear of speaking up for their children. I also became more sensitive to teacher-student power dynamics. While my son did not speak up to his teacher about the name-calling, some African American males might have challenged her and might have been suspended for doing so. This episode taught me to care about what other African American males experience in school.

My Cultural Awakening

I was rarely involved in conversations at home or in my integrated high school that centered on black-white issues. It was as though my parents and teachers sought to protect me, my siblings, and other students from the pain of discussing unpleasant issues.

Unfortunately, avoidance of talk about race may have led me away from focusing on problems within the African American community and may have created a discomfort when dealing with those problems. I had attended a white undergraduate institution and during that time I had never heard of a study directly devoted to African American issues. Instructors and students tended to talk around racial issues, so few opportunities existed for me to consider race either as it is lived or conceptualized. As a result, this silencing lead to a false premise that race relations were good. An exception to my silence was my speaking up during a marriage and family class when a student indicated that more African American women have babies out of wedlock. When I stated that all unmarried women tend to get pregnant at the same rate, but most caucasian women decide not to give birth to their babies, the room became totally silent and still. The professor, a white male, seemed to appreciate my outspokenness because he followed up with statements to back my assertion.

I attended Tuskegee University, a historically black university in Alabama, for my master's degree. I became immersed in discourse about the plight of African American males while at Tuskegee. In some of my classes, students were conducting studies and projects that focused on problems African American males face. For her thesis, one colleague conducted a study about the life experiences of African American male adolescents. A male colleague looked at issues involving mentoring African American males. At the same time, my sister, a graduate student in a white institution, wrote a paper on African American males and academic achievement. I began to ponder the school problems of my friend's African American son and of other young brothers with

whom I attended high school. I became concerned about the educational experiences of African American males and recognized the need for additional research in this area.

The strong consciousness about problems within the African American community permeated one particular research class at Tuskegee. I remember vividly one presentation where an African American male discussed his literature review. The statistics were startling. He introduced us to a metaphor: the African American male as an endangered specie. I was devastated that the status of African American males was such that the term would be used to refer to them. "I have an African American male child!" I thought. I became more aware of the issues of young boys in our community who seemed to walk through life aimlessly. What is to become of them? This was another lesson in coming to care about African American males.

Learning to Care About African American Males Through Doctoral Coursework

The year that I spent at Tuskegee University lead to my awakening to issues relating to African American males. But, sometimes it is essential to step out of one's environment in order to better understand it. Following that awakening, the Ph.D. coursework at the University of Minnesota provided in-depth understanding of social and philosophical issues in education as they relate race, class, and gender. The coursework provided the impetus for applying a holistic perspective to research about African American males. This section will focus on some of those courses, concepts, and issues. They include my introduction to different research methods, critical pedagogy, history and philosophy of education, tracking in education, and social efficiency.

The research studies in my masters program at Tuskegee primarily focused on positivistic research methods. Through courses at the University of Minnesota, I experienced a paradigm shift. I now see the ultimate purpose of positivistic research to be control. In the social sciences, that means control over the social world. In contrast, interpretive research shows us that individuals construct meaning from their experiences and critical science research shows us that they can emancipate themselves from limiting conditions. A course in interpretive and critical science research was an integral part of my selecting phenomenological research to allow African American male inmates' voices to be heard.

Through other courses, I began to understand my son's experiences by way of concepts such as dominate and subordinate cultures and false consciousness. I have found that some of the values and beliefs of the dominate culture have been assimilated by the African American community; this may be a coping mechanism for some. Individuals who allow themselves to be assimilated tend to be unaware that the negative, oppressive views the dominate culture holds of African Americans can be internalized by themselves. As a result of hegemony, there is widespread blame in the African American community for individuals who have problems. This blaming is misplaced since America's capitalist system perpetuates inequalities in education, the workforce, and other facets of life (Apple, 1982; Giroux, 1989; McLaren, 1994). A false consciousness about the cause of problems exists because individuals uncritically accept the views of the dominate culture. This false consciousness is perpetuated through schools as when

African Americans hear nothing wrong when a white teacher admonishes an African American child to quit acting like a monkey.

Studying education from historical, political, economic, and social perspectives gave me a new focus on issues relating to the education of African Americans. For example, I found that a society calling itself a democracy does not make it a democracy. A school curriculum that includes carpentry, horticulture, and cosmetology is not truly democratic simply because it offers students career choices. When students' choices are limited to preparing for lower paying, lower status jobs, then someone has made a calculated decision that those careers are best suited for the students and has restricted other choices.

Doctoral courses also increased my awareness of the impact of tracking in education. Class, race, gender, and power issues are a part of every classroom, and they are evident in the curriculum. For example, tracking in education largely effects people of color, especially those who are directed toward vocational education. Oakes (1992) points out that evidence consistently indicates that low-income minority students are receiving fewer and fewer opportunities for successful school and work-related outcomes once they are tracked. A university professor stated that, "If people in all walks of life would simply treat other people's children the way they treat their own, then we would not have all of these social problems." His statement made a profound impact on my understanding of tracking. Those who track other people's children into educational streams with undesirable outcomes, place their own children in streams where they expect

better outcomes. Now I see more clearly that tracking can have a lasting negative effect on African American males in schools.

The last example of learning in doctoral coursework to be noted here is, social efficiency in education which was central in the debate between David Snedden and John Dewey (Wirth, 1974) in the early part of this century. Snedden advanced the ideal of social efficiency which promoted the idea of educating individuals for their places in society. One of the basic tenents of this philosophy of education was that a student should not be taught knowledge which was not appropriate to his or her career or consistent with his or her ability. That ability was to be judged by others, not by the student. There was an assumption of pre-destiny and permanent status. In reflection, Mrs. Flowers' belief that my son does not have to attend college seems to exemplify Snedden's philosophy of education. I infer she judged an appropriate career for him would not necessitate his attending college and that his ability precluded his success in college. Because of the widespread application of social efficiency, which is based on an assumption that some are inferior to others, I have concluded that our present educational system is not designed to promote equality. African American males are largely affected by these views. Unexpectedly, the study of abstract ideas in doctoral coursework nurtured my caring about African American males in schools.

Coming to Care About the Educational Experiences of African American Male Inmates

I view my time at Tuskegee University and the University of Minnesota as being comprised of lived experiences and learning about theories and philosophies that encouraged

caring about the educational experiences of African American male inmates. While we should care about all students, the rates at which African American males are incarcerated (Mauer, 1990) are devastating and beckon my special attention. This is an alarming problem for those men, their families, the African American community and the nation.

If the economic conditions for many incarcerated men had been improved, they would have most likely had better living conditions and finer educational opportunities. It is likely that they could have made different choices in life that would have prevented their incarceration. Just as I and many other mothers are proud of our sons, an inmate may have been a proud mother's baby. Perhaps his mother wanted better educational opportunities for him, but she may have had negative educational experiences herself when she was in school. As a result, she may have been unable to assist him as necessary. Too little schooling and too much incarceration have dire consequences for African American males and brings me to care about them. I care about their experiences in school because I care about their future and their need to experience life to its fullest, just as other individuals would. I care about their ability to pursue a career, to help others, to contribute to society, and to provide emotional and financial support for their families. I also care about their stance as proud African Americans and their ability to recognize the importance of their culture and of transferring the importance of their culture to future generations. A solid educational experience is vital.

The impact of the rate of incarceration of African American males on society also brings me to care about their educational experiences. With so many African Americans males removed from the workforce, we will be facing serious problems in the future. It will

be increasingly difficult to compete in the global economy when they are not contributing to their families through wages they earn. Their labor is needed in the face of a shortage of skilled workers in many states at the turn of the century. We also need to see them in upper management positions if we are to utilize our nation's resources fully. Understanding the lived educational experiences of African American males can assist us in our efforts to guide them and others into positive educational outcomes.

Chapter Two

Understanding African American Males

The purpose of this chapter is to survey some of the context in which African American males live their daily lives. I will examine selected aspects of the social, historical, political, and economic environment which surrounded them in the past and surrounds them today. The chapter starts with reasons why we should view African American males' lives holistically and why we should listen to their voices. Then I address the persistence of racism across time, white constructed stereotypes of African American males, employment and economic discrimination against African American males, the Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois debate, and school experiences of African American males.

This chapter will also point to some coping mechanism which African American males have used to survive their daily trials and tribulations. Lastly, I will briefly comment on the research on African Americans. We turn now to why we should view African American males' lives holistically and listen to their voices.

Improving Our Understanding of African American Males' Experiences

Examining the educational experiences of African American male inmates is complex because of the multifaceted issues rooted in the history of individuals with African ancestry living in America. The commitment for carrying out this study was encouraged by the work of DuBois (1940) and Hill (1993). They postulated that conducting credible research on African Americans without examining their experiences holistically is impossible. By holistic, I mean here combined experiences as opposed to

examining only a single experience or a single variable. Improving one's understanding of the lived experiences of African American males also requires one to listen carefully to African American male voices. They, after all, know most about their experiences.

Importance of Viewing African American Males Holistically

Looking at both external and internal factors can help us appreciate more fully the complexity of African American males' lives. According to Hill (1993), the major external forces affecting African Americans are (1) "social stratification -- race, class, and sector, (2) racism -- individual and institutional, (3) sexism, (4) birth rates, (5) sex ratios (6) migration -- domestic and international, and (7) economic factors -- industrialization, periodic recessions, and spiraling inflation" (p. 40). Some of these factors have reciprocal effects on each other. External factors can be seen as outside the control of African American males and as significant aspects of the context of their everyday experiences.

Internal factors include "persistent high rates of unemployment, crime, delinquency, gang violence, drug abuse, AIDS, and alcohol abuse" (Hill, 1993, p. 79). Internal factors can be viewed from the individual, family, or community level, but they are differentiated from external factors in that the actions of individuals can contribute to these factors occurring in their own lives. These factors seem to draw a lot of attention. Yet, a host of positive resources including churches and community organizations exist within the African American community. Beyond the community, there are resources such as extended school programs and federal and state programs which have enriched the lives of African American males (Logan, 1996). A holistic view of African American

males takes into account the complex interactions of external and internal factors as one tries to understand them.

A specific example of the relationship between external and internal factors is seen in the link between poverty and poor school achievement. Taylor (1995) noted that the majority of students who have poor school achievement are products of low socioeconomic backgrounds. Often, there is only one income contributing to the family's needs and as a result the family is subjected to poor housing and schools and an increase in health problems (Gibbs, 1995). Researchers (Gad & Johnson, 1980; Lewis, Siegal, & Lewis, 1984; Myers, 1989; Newcomb, Huba, & Butler, 1981; Pryor-Brown, 1989) also indicated a link between low socioeconomic status, stressful life events and psychological problems.

African American male inmates are a subset of African American males whom we should view holistically. How we view inmates is complicated by our sense that they themselves may have been victims and at the same time they should be held responsible for their actions. Many inmates have received a poor education, have histories of having been abused as children, or are mentally ill. Yet, they perpetrated a crime against another. If we cling to a view of them as victims, we fail to note the action for which they should be held accountable; conversely, if we view them as perpetrators, we fail to see the antecedents that led to their crimes. Viewing them holistically opens the possibilities for seeing the infinite complexity of their lives.

Importance of Listening to African American Male Voices

The final reason that a holistic emphasis is important because African American males themselves can teach us much about their own experiences and beliefs; therefore it is important to listen to them. For example, in Understanding Black Adolescent Male Violence: Its Remediation and Prevention (1992), Wilson shared his beliefs that black-on-black violence has its roots in white-on-black physical and psychological violence. He further contended that such violence by whites produces hegemony within the black community because many are unable to understand why they carry such low standards for one another.

In his book, Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man In America, Nathan McCall (1995) recalled his experiences with violence in school. McCall explained how he was harassed, intimidated and beaten by white students in a predominately white middle school in Virginia until his grades began slipping and his parents transferred him to the middle school in his community. He raised the point that these encounters occurred in the presence of white teachers who avoided contact with him and looked the other way as he was harassed and threatened by the white students. McCall's voice is important. Without it, we would not fully notice the teacher turning away--away from the child and away from the child being harassed.

In Brothers, Monroe (1988) pointed out the importance of the voices of African American males interviewed for his book. He wrote,

> They have been as candid about their vices as about their virtues; they allowed us . . . to see them whole, as men, not statistics, with all the strengths, weaknesses, hopes, and vanities that are part of the human condition. (p. xii)

Monroe (1988) challenges us to understand the whole man instead of stopping at statistics. Understanding the whole man identifies their entire being. Their dedication and concern about contributing to Monroe's book are evident in their revelation of their strengths and weaknesses. Monroe's presentation of the voices of African American males is important because quite often, we only hear negative reports about them and his work helps us to envision what it is like to live their lives from their point of view.

In the introduction to Soulfires, Wideman (1996) highlighted the worries we have about African American male babies because of their potential as men to be among the disproportionately high death and incarceration rates of African American males. His words convey the anxiety of young African American males:

> What happens when a generation in the yawning, bloody void between a young man and his nearest free, surviving male kin, gurgling innocently on his lap? What do you do when a 'generation' is the empty pit in your stomach, the lump that rises in your throat when you are holding a baby in your arms knowing the moment you put him down, if not sooner, you could lose him? What happens when 'a generation' is how much the evidence weighs, the evidence you must surmount to begin to craft strategies to insure a baby's safe passage through this world? (pp. ix - x)

Wideman's fears are rational as we consider the conditions that African American male children and men face in school and society. We must consider internal and external issues they face to fully understand what they tell us. Knowledge of the lived experiences of African American males may help us to understand realities associated with the frustrations and challenges they face. But, we must be willing to listen to them; to hear their perspectives. We must also be willing to learn more about their history in America.

Experiences of African American Males

The Persistence of Racism

Being the target of racism may be the most distinctive experience of African American males. It began in the 17th century when they were brought to this continent as slaves and will most likely endure well into the 21st century. Racism has permeated all aspects of their everyday lives: education, religion, work, recreation, family life, and citizenship.

In The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935, Anderson (1988) related lived experiences of African American male slaves and the problems they endured while attempting to learn to read, when he stated that:

> Thomas H. Jones, a slave in mid-nineteenth-century North Carolina, learned how to read while hiding in the back of his master's store. "It seemed to me that if I could learn to read and write . . . this learning might, nay, I really thought it would point out to me the way to freedom, influence and real [sic] secure happiness." As he became more engrossed in his pursuit of literate culture and careless about concealing it, Jones was surprised one morning by the sudden

> appearance of his master. Having only a second to react, Jones threw his book behind some barrels in the store, but not before his master had seen him throw something away. The slaveowner assumed that Jones had been stealing items from the stockroom and ordered him to retrieve whatever he had thrown away. "I knew if my book was discovered that all was lost, and I felt prepared for any hazard or suffering rather that give up my book and my hopes of improvement." He endured three brutal whippings to conceal his pursuit of literacy. (pp. 16-17)

Racism is evident in Jones having to endure physical abuse to conceal his learning to read. In another story, Anderson stated that a slave had been put to death for teaching a slave-child how to read. The child was also beaten to make him forget what he had learned.

Another example of racism was embedded in the church. Many white preachers were instructed to give slaves catechisms to teach them that they were inferior (Martin & Martin, 1985). An excerpt from one follows:

> Question: Who gave you a master?
> Answer: God gave him to me.
> Question: Who says you must obey him?
> Answer: God say that I must.
> Question: What did God make you for?
> Answer: To make crop. (p. 27)

Finally, many believe that the biblical character, Cain was cursed because he was black. To them, being black is seen as inferior. Perhaps it is from that perspective that societal views of African American males are formulated. In what is believed to be the

"first poetic protest in Black American literature" (Robinson, 1975), Phillis Wheatley furthered the belief that Cain was black.

> Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
> Taught my benighted soul to understand
> That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too.
> Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
> Some view our sable race with scornful eye;
> "Their colour is a diabolic dye."
> Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain,
> May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train (p. 60).

The landmark decision regarding Plessy vs. Ferguson in 1886 established the legality of the separate but equal doctrine. Racism was disclosed in Mr. Ferguson's experience while riding a train, an action that would normally be considered mundane. This case referred to the removal of an African American male from the front of the train to an area in the back reserved for blacks. The Plessy vs. Ferguson case and other laws regarding separation were based on race. Everything, according to Mahmoud El-Kati (1993) can be associated with race. He stated:

> According to racist logic, all behavior can be attributed to "race." Individual ability or cultural achievement is accounted for by "race." African people are supposed to be more criminally inclined, less likely to value education, seek employment, care for their families; more prone to lie, cheat, or steal than Europeans--simply because of their "race." Black people are, in effect, less endowed to be decent human beings than whites. (p. 22)

He further believed that religion is one cause for the lack of positive traits attributed to African Americans. There are examples to support El-Kati's belief. In the debate

between DuBois and Washington. DuBois pointed out the hypocrisy associated with Christians who supported industrial education while believing in the inferiority of African Americans.

Undoubtably, slaves being taught catechisms that subordinated them, the belief that Cain was cursed because he was black, and the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision illustrate a connection between color and inferior treatment. They also point out the legacy of racism for African American males. When we read literature across the decades, we see evidence of the unnecessary experiences African American males face because of their race. The cases cited here are not isolated or idiosyncratic.

Racism persists in the everyday lives of African American males. Keith Watters (1995), past President of the National Bar Association noted in a statement on the World Wide Web that, "the Aryan Resistance Movement has declared 'war' on African-Americans, Jews and the United States Government." He continued:

> Hate propaganda is more than mere words. It has inspired an atmosphere of hatred which has resulted in a significant and continuing assault upon the civil rights of African-Americans. We are witnessing a resurgence of violence not witnessed since the tumultuous 1960's. When we compare the 1960's to today, we see striking similarities. In 1963, Meger Evers was brutally murdered in Jackson, Mississippi. In 1995, a young Fayettevelle couple, Michael James, 36, and Jackie Burden, 27, were shot five times in the head at close range as they walked down the street. It has been alleged that three U.S. Army soldiers with white supremacy views murdered the couple during a night of "hunting" for African-Americans.

In 1997, in Chicago, a 13-year-old African American male was beaten and left in a coma by three white, male teenagers for riding his bicycle through their neighborhoods. His physical condition carried similarities with those of another African American male, Emmitt Till, who was murdered by whites. Fifty years ago, a black, male teenager was also riding his bike in a white neighborhood in Birmingham, Alabama when he was attacked by whites and killed. These horrible situations reveal the prevalence and persistence of racism, hatred and fear. African American males cannot go about their daily activities without racism imposing limitations. Stereotypes of African American males which are constructed by whites contribute to the limitations.

White Constructed Stereotypes of African American Males

The legacy of racism appears to have cast an indelible problem for African Americans and African American males in particular. Stereotypes about African American males have been largely constructed by whites and have caused emotional and physical pain and even death for these men. Images of the African American males as inferior, worthless, and dangerous have been constructed and may have even been assimilated into the minds of other races.

African American males seen as mentally inferior. Images of African Americans as inferior have been widespread in educational settings. In 1933, in the Mis-education of the Negro, Dr. Carter G. Woodson wrote:

> At a Negro summer school two years ago, a white instructor gave a course on the Negro, using for his text a work which teaches that whites are superior to the blacks. When asked by one of the students why he used such a textbook, the

instructor replied that he wanted them to get that point of view. Even schools for Negroes, then, are places where they must be convinced of their inferiority. (p. 2)

A number of other school books portrayed black people as mentally inferior and were designed to maintain economic and racial submissiveness through social values in books. Anderson (1988) pointed out that The American Tract Society of the American Missionary Association published The Freedmen's Primer, The Freedmen's Spelling Book, The Lincoln Primer, and the first, second and third Freedmen's Readers, each of which contained messages of racial inferiority and subordination.

In a contemporary study examining how African American male scholars achieved prominence, Willie (1986) interviewed five scholars. We find that even highly educated African American males are viewed as inferior. The acclaimed psychologist, Dr. Kenneth B. Clark completed both bachelors and masters degrees in psychology at Howard University. His mentor, Dr. Francis Cecil Sumner, demanded high standards for his students. Clark was advised to pursue the Ph.D. degree. Yet, while doing so at Columbia University in 1937, the faculty believed Clark was inferior. Fortunately, according to Willie (1986), it did not hamper his progress. According to Willie:

> Clark was able to move through Columbia rapidly because he found "no challenges at Columbia that were more challenging than the standards of Sumner." According to Clark, however, some professors at Columbia were "surprised and amazed that a black could meet their standards and even surpass them." At Columbia he was invited to join Sigma Xi, and he ranked first among those who took the qualifying examination with him for the Ph.D. degree. The

> head of the program was "so amazed" that he summoned Clark to his office and interrogated him; he asked Clark to account for the fact that he had come out ahead of all the others who took the examination. "It was preordained that I would do well at Columbia when I studied for my Ph.D. degree, because of Sumner." (p. 49)

Why was high academic achievement by an African American man surprising for the white professors? Why would Clark's achievements cause him to be interrogated? Had Clark been white, would he still have been cross examined? Even Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with both a theology degree and a Doctor of Philosophy degree and Colin Powell, whose intelligence was disclosed in his leadership of the armed services during the Persian Gulf War were viewed inferior to hold public office. In other words, despite their intelligence, African American males as a group have been viewed mentally inferior across time.

African American males treated as worthless and less than human. There are countless examples of society's view of the worthlessness of African American males in research and in popular literature. Anderson (1988) shared the following statement by a former slave: "Why, we were no more than dogs! If they caught us with a piece of paper in our pockets, they'd whip us" (p. 281).

In Bullwhip Days (1988), former slaves told of a life that resembled death itself and a life that encompasses constant fear, inner rage, physical and mental pain, and worthlessness. According to one of the slaves:

> One time, one of the slaves was helping Mistress there in the yard, and he passed too close to her, as he was hurrying fast as he could, and sort of bumped into her. She never paid him no attention, but Maser saw him. . . he called that poor Negro to him and took him out in the pasture, tied his hands together, throwed the other end of the rope over a limb on a tree, and pulled that Negro's hands up in the air to where that Negro had to stand on his tiptoes. And Maser, he took all that Negro's clothes off and whipped him with that rawhide whip until that Negro was plumb bloddy [sic] all over. Then, he left that poor Negro tied there all the rest of the day and night. . . that was one of the sickest Negroes you ever saw, after that. . . and Master was whipping him all the time. . . (p. 235)

Like most slaves, this man was treated worse than an animal, as though he was of no use or value to anyone or anything. In another example, Lulu Wilson reminded us of how slave owners distorted the truth about emancipation for their own gain. Her story also indicates slave owners' lack of care or concern for the slave children.

> My step-paw 'lowed as how the Feds done told him they ain't no more slavery, and he tried to p'int it out to Wash Hodges. Wash says they's a new ruling, and it am that growed-up niggers is free, but chillun has to stay with they masters till they's of age. (p. 326)

In this passage, we are reminded that not only were slave owners creating their own rules, they were separating parents from children. When this separation occurred, the children lost their only source of love and comfort. They were left alone to survive in a world where they were viewed as both a source of labor and worthless as animals being taken to

slaughter. In fact, the institution of slavery guaranteed a constant fear of being slaughtered. There is evidence that African Americans are still viewed as worth less than others. Kozol's (1991) conversation with a doctor at the Cook County Hospital in Chicago illustrated the view that African Americans are worthless permeates hospitals. Kozol wrote:

> In explanation of the fact that white patients in cardiac care are two to three times as likely as black patients to be given by-pass surgery, he [the doctor] wonders whether white physicians may be "less inclined to invest in a black patient's heart" than in the heart of a "white, middle-class executive" because the future economic value of the white man, who is far more likely to return to a productive job, is often so much higher. Investment strategies in education, as we've seen, are often framed in the same terms: How much is it worth investing in this child as opposed to that one? Where will we see the best return? (p. 116-117)

Worthless is defined as without worth, use, value, dignity or honor (Webster's Dictionary, 1988). How did society come to the point where a person's worth is determined simply by race?

African American males as dangerous. A University of Chicago sociologist, William Julius Wilson, told Monroe (1995) that the image of Black men is one of threat and danger. Are they viewed as dangerous because they are stereotyped as hyper-sexed? African American males are believed to be preoccupied with sex and the fulfilment of their role as a lover. This view, according to Gary (1981), is a racist conception. When we remember Emmett Till and Mack Charles Parker, we see a connection between the

white racist conception of African American men as dangerous and the consequences for African American males. Ladner (1995) expands further:

> I had grown up in an era that I once dubbed the "Emmett Till generation" because it was in 1955 that this fourteen-year-old boy near my own age was lynched in Mississippi for allegedly whistling at a white woman twice his age. Three years later Mack Charles Parker would be dragged from the Poplarville, Mississippi, jail and lynched for allegedly raping a white woman from Hattiesburg, my hometown. Over the years the Jet Magazine cover photograph of Emmitt Till's grotesque body after it was pulled from the Tallahatchie River would haunt me and countless black youths of my generation who eventually found their places among the ranks of black student civil rights activists . . . (p. ix)

Lingering effects of Emmitt Till's murder for other African American males are painful. Dr. James Comer (1988), an African American physician and educator commented on his and other African American males' reaction to the incident in Maggie's American Dream. He commented:

> Simmering resentment exploded one day during my second summer [in college]. The black men were absolutely furious. They had heard about Emmett Till's lynching. They'd talk about it a few minutes, and somebody would pick up something and throw it across the room. One banged his hand repeatedly on a locker. I ached in the pit of my stomach. (p. 169)

Because African American males are as viewed as dangerous and violent, they are stereotyped as innately criminal. Black-on-black violence is thought to be explained

through these stereotypes. But understanding the violence that African American males inflict on each other must be placed in the context of violence that has historically been perpetrated against African Americans by whites. In Understanding Black Adolescent Male Violence, Wilson (1991) expressed the idea that the origins of Black-on-Black violence are "rooted in and reflective of the sociocultural, politicoeconomic past and contemporary history of America" (p. 6). Wilson believed that because social scientists have failed to place the cause of Black-on-Black violence in this context, it has led to the stereotyping of young Black males as "innately criminal." He attributes physical and psychological violence to the lived experiences of African Americans:

> The physical and psychological violence of White America against Black Americans which began with Afrikan [sic] slavery in America has continued to this moment in a myriad of forms: wage slavery and peonage; economic discrimination and warfare; political-economic disenfranchisement; Jim Crowism; general White hostility and Klan terrorism; lynching; injustice and "legal lynching," the raping of Black women and the killing of Black men by Whites which have gone unredressed by the justice system; the near-condoning and virtual approval of Black-on-Black violence; differential arrests, criminal indictments and incarceration of Whites and Blacks, etc.; segregation; job, business, professional and labor discrimination; negative stereotyping and character assassination; housing discrimination; police brutality; addictive drug importation; poor and inadequate education; inadequate and often absent health care; inadequate family support, etc. (p. 7-8)

Wilson further believed that the American society is "crimogenic" because of the denial of the violence against African Americans and asserted that the original sins can be "atoned for, restituted, reparated and forgiven"(p.8). However, any denial of the crimes against African Americans only leads to a slandering of African American culture and the blaming of them for their oppression.

Dangerous connotations of African American males are stressful for them as well as those who attempt to protect them (Wideman and Preston, 1996). As Rohan Preston (1996) indicated, there are glaring differences between the way African American males and white males are viewed:

> And as teenagers, wayward or not, we are treated as adults. Where a thirty-something Neil Bush, the son of ex-president George Bush, is called "a kid" by commentators after he is implicated in serious shenanigans in the failure of a savings-and-loan institution, young Black men are never afforded a childhood, or innocence, or the benefit of the doubt (introduction).

The image of the African American male as dangerous has increased in recent years and it carries over to the employment place. Monroe (1995), included the following in his article, "America's Most Feared," from an interview with an African-American male:

> "These incidents are almost an everyday occurrence," says an angry Black Los Angeles plumber, who once found himself surrounded by three gun-wielding Santa Monica police officers responding to a call about a "suspicious character." The call came from a neighbor who lived near an apartment building where the

> plumber had repaired a water heater. Detained for 20 minutes, the plumber was forced to let the officers examine his tools and then led them through a basement to verify the work he had done. Finally, satisfied, the officers made no apology for the mistake. "I spend more time calming people's apprehension than just doing my job," the workman says. "It eats at you, but you can't dwell on it or it will consume you." (p. 22)

African American males are helpless in eliminating stereotypes about them. Why does the worker carry the burden of calming people's apprehensions when his focus should be his job? How does it feel to discover that someone is afraid of you when you have no malevolent intent? Comer (1988) described another incident illustrating the reaction of a white female of an African American male:

> Donald Perry was coming down the hill near our dormitory at dusk. He looked more like a happy-go-lucky Ichabod Crane than a "black, brute, rapist." But a white female student looked up and saw him coming down the path and ran away screaming. He was left standing there, saying, "Come back, little girl, I'm not going to bother you." He hadn't done anything. The stereotype was in her mind. (p. 162)

When we consider the difficulties African American males face in school and in society, one is left to question the impact of the stereotype in one's mind. The examples in this section illustrate the way African American males are viewed by some white people as inferior, worthless, and dangerous.

Employment and Economic Discrimination Against African American Males

Stereotypes and other expressions of racism impact African American males' status in the workforce. Many African American men were not educated as well as their counterparts and therefore they have been unable to compete successfully in the workforce. Hale (1994) believed that the shift from the industrial to the postindustrial era has left most African American males in a state of economic disparity. Because they have received inferior or little education, they are unprepared for the higher skilled jobs (Hale, 1994).

The effects of slavery were not only psychologically debilitating, but also economically destructive for African Americans. During slavery African Americans provided labor for little or no pay. Many believe that America was built on the backs of African Americans, particularly males who were deemed strong enough to handle some of the most physically demanding forms of labor such as building roads and bridges, plowing behind a farm animal, or plowing without the power of an animal.

Jobs which require hard labor and low pay are viewed as synonymous with slavery among many African Americans today. Vocational education is seen as preparing students for physical work and low paying jobs, so it is not surprising that many African Americans disassociated themselves from any vocational training program (Anderson, 1988). It is important that vocational educators and educators in general are aware of this history in order to understand the stance of African Americans regarding education and work issues.

Early research (Weaver, 1946) regarding labor and economic challenges of African American males revealed the presence of discrimination in the workplace and in employment seeking. And even though they are equally qualified, employers tend to "statistically discriminate" against African American males versus white males in hiring practices (Ferguson, 1996). Ferguson elaborated on the impact of statistical discrimination:

> Statistical discrimination is illegal and unfair to its victims. It gives each black male an additional burden of proof to carry: the burden of proving that he is an exception to whatever stereotype against young black males that the employer might carry in his head. (p. 93)

The unfair work-related treatment of African American males has endured for centuries. Earlier, industrial training in the south was heavily financed because of the economic value of African Americans to perform heavy labor such as cotton farming. Most of the major contributors of industrial training, including Tuskegee University's first major contributor, Andrew Carnegie, held this view (Anderson, 1988). The gap in income between African Americans and European Americans was enormous, but, for the most part went unchanged. In 1996, Ferguson (1996) reported that in 1975, there was a 8% difference in earning potential between black and white males. However, between 1988-92, a 16% gap existed for 23-35 year old males. Gaps in the median earnings of year-round, full-time workers revealed more than a $6,000 difference between black and white males with high school diplomas. Allen and Jewell (1996) indicated that white males with college degrees also received higher earnings than black males with college

degrees by over $9,000.00. Income differentials are also attributed to educational differences. One issue fueling educational differences was a question of how African Americans would be educated.

The Washington/DuBois Debate

The historical debate regarding the education of African Americans between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois informs our understanding of the context of lived experiences of African American males. This debate is important because we see in it the persistent ideologies regarding the education of African Americans throughout our history in the United States. These ideologies were present and affecting African American males during slavery and the time period of this debate (the early 1900's) and are still affecting them today.

Samuel Armstrong, the President of Hampton Institute, was asked to select someone to become the president of a new school in Tuskegee, Alabama. As a graduate of Hampton Institute, Washington was selected, and the students at Tuskegee were taught in the same manner as Hampton's students. Anderson (1988) believed that Washington accepted Armstrong's philosophy of preparing black students for "their place" in society. For example, Hampton's industrial teacher training system consisted of an elementary academic program, work through industrial labor, and strict social discipline (Anderson, 1988).

The historical debate was fueled by DuBois' (1903) fight against this educational system and his belief that Washington's teachings contributed to deprivation and inferiority for African Americans and a decline in funding for liberal education for them.

His beliefs were well supported. While it was acknowledged that white male youths were developing into manhood without the pressures and limitations African American male youths faced, one white Hampton instructor believed that the pressures African Americans faced could be endured if they believed in and accepted their inferiority (Anderson, 1988). These were Armstrong's beliefs which became the teachings at Hampton and, subsequently, were the beliefs Washington advanced.

In The Economic Development of the Negro Race in Slavery, Washington indicated his tremendous gratitude toward white men for helping the "Negro." Anderson (1988) noted that Washington believed that whites' Christian beliefs would transform their views of the Negro, while DuBois noted the hypocrisy associated with whites' Christian beliefs and their treatment of the Negro.

The individual lived experiences of Washington and DuBois may have contributed to their differences in opinion regarding how blacks should be educated. For example, Washington had been a slave and was vocationally educated at Hampton, while DuBois received a liberal education from Fisk, Berlin and Harvard universities. Although in later years, when social and political conditions were not improving for blacks, Anderson (1988) believed that Washington still supported industrial education as the means to make those social and political improvements since vocational schools continued to be generously financially supported.

Lived experiences no-doubt influenced their initial beliefs, and lived experiences may have brought about a transformation in Washington. Williams (1997) suggested that Washington's beliefs advanced through three stages that paralleled views of African

American nationalists. Washington viewed Africans as being "primitive barbarians," then as contributing to "world civilization," and finally believed that "Ethiopia was the disseminator of knowledge to West Africa" (p. 211). We see the change in his views, in Selected Speeches (1932), where he spoke about how the Negro is viewed as inferior by whites. Relating such inferior beliefs to school funding discrepancies, he noted the following:

> There is sometimes much talk about the inferiority of the Negro. In practice, however, the idea appears to be that he is a sort of superman. He is expected, with about one fifth of what the whites receives [sic] for their education, to make as much progress as they are making. Taking the Southern states as a whole, about $10.23 per capita is spent in educating the average white boy or girl, and the sum of $2.82 per capita in educating the average black child. (p. 282)

This passage indicates a bolder, more cynical Washington who realized that Negro children were not deemed worthy of funding equal to white children. Despite the inequitable education they received, Negro children were expected to maintain academic progress equal to white students. Perhaps he accepted the fact that the wealth he thought would accompany industrial education for Negroes would not necessarily bring equality and justice as he had previously believed. But his comments on higher education indicated a larger change in his beliefs about the hypocrisy of industrial education supporters, a change that echoed DuBois' philosophy years earlier. Washington continued,

> If the amount of property devoted to Negro higher education were at all proportionate to the number of Negroes in the population of the country, they would have for their higher training about one hundred million dollars invested in property instead of the twenty million dollars which they now have. (p. 282-283)

In previous years, Washington may not have addressed equity in education funding. But, we see that his way of thinking changed. Washington continued to call attention to the level of cooperation needed to make Negro education equal to whites, but he still did not encourage integration (Anderson, 1988). Was he acquiescing to the separate but equal doctrine or did he believe it was important to maintain historically black colleges and universities for some intrinsic reason? Whatever the case, Washington illustrated his belief that education should be the same for "Negro" children as for Caucasian children.

In Washington's last speeches, there is a spirit in his words that intimately connects with DuBois. This connection reveals to us that despite their known differences, they had one main commonality: their love for African Americans. Washington (1932) stated:

> At the present rate it is taking, not a few days or a few years, but a century or more to get Negro education on a plane at all similar to that on which the education of the whites is. To bring Negro education up where it ought to be, it will take the combined and increased efforts of all the agencies now engaged in this work. The North, the South, the religious associations, the educational boards, white people and black people, all will have to cooperate in a great effort to this common end. (p. 283)

In this speech, he was clearly more concerned about equal opportunity in education. In this instance, Washington's views paralleled DuBois', and DuBois may have been aware of Washington's transition. We see DuBois' respect for Washington illustrated in his refusal to allow their differences to undermine the contributions Washington made. In The Souls of Black Folk (1903), he poignantly analyzed some of those contributions:

> It would be unjust to Mr. Washington not to acknowledge that in several instances he has opposed movements in the South which were unjust to the Negro; he sent memorials to the Louisiana and Alabama constitutional conventions, he has spoken against lynching, and in other ways has openly or silently set his influence against sinister schemes and unfortunate happenings. (p. 250-251)

These quotations are important to point out because we learn much about Washington and DuBois as African American men. Historians rarely point out the somewhat amicable relationship between them as illustrated from the above quotation by DuBois. Most writers choose to focus on their disagreements.

When we examine the features of the debate, six themes emerge. The components of the Washington and DuBois debate included: (a) social efficiency, and social Darwinism, (b) lower class and inferior status perpetuated through industrial education, (c) democracy and citizenship, (d) political, social, and economic power, (e) unity and cooperation among Negro educational institutions, and (f) religion--or its hypocrisy as associated with slavery and injustices. These components were in large part, shaped by their lived experiences and the debate discloses the competing ideologies of their time.

The educational philosophies of Washington and DuBois are rooted in economic, and political ideologies. Views of the dominate culture heavily influenced the debate between them. While white philanthropists supported Tuskegee and industrial education for blacks, DuBois fought against "large sections of the black press, a cadre of black educators in small industrial schools, and powerful white politicians" (Anderson, 1988, p. 106), which entailed what Anderson believed was a determination to discredit DuBois and his supporters.

Issues of classism and racism of DuBois and Washington's day were so profound that they have endured. African American educators continue to experience difficulties as they attempt to influence to decisions about the education of African American children (Delpit, 1988). In her article, "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children," Delpit attributed such difficulties to issues related to the "culture of power."

The continuation of giving little credibility to African American educators to make decisions about the education of their children is evident in Delpit's article and the 1997 Ebonics debate in which the School Board in the Oakland Unified School District in California attempted to structure an English program for African American students. In that school district, African Americans comprise more than 50% of the student population, and 71% of Special Education students (Anderson, 1997). While the school board's program was deemed racist, what was racist was the mistaken belief that African American educators would teach their children a form of English other than Standard English. This illustrates a largely African American group of educators being viewed as

incapable of deciding how best to educate African American children. Almost a century after the historical Washington and DuBois debate, the issues Delpit presented in 1988 and the Ebonics debate revealed in 1997, illustrates the long lasting struggle for African Americans to define education for their children.

Coping Mechanisms and Survival Strategies of African American Males

Earlier sections included external factors which impact the lives of African American males and such stereotypes of being inferior, worthless, and dangerous. Learning about their coping mechanisms for these daily tribulations contributes to a holistic view of these males. To cope is to contend with the daily tribulations and to overcome them. As African American males go about their daily lives, it is much too stressful to constantly attempt to change how others view them. Developing coping mechanisms is a way to survive those problems on a daily basis and to find pride in being African American while dealing with the problems. To some, coping mechanisms or survival strategies may mean accepting the racism, the inferior and worthless treatment, and the belief that African American males are dangerous.

Research has shown that individuals differ in their ability to avoid consuming everyday stressors such as being viewed as inferior, worthless, and dangerous. Middle class African Americans tend to be more confident in their ability to effectively deal with the challenges of negative stereotypes. Conversely, individuals who are less confident tend not to take steps to help them deal with factors over which they perceive they have no control (Taylor, 1981).

Both internal and external factors affect the academic achievement of black students. For example, Houston (1988), found that cultural values, self esteem, locus of control, and intellectual development influenced suburban black students' achievement. Ford (1993), notes that black students in urban areas have an external locus of control and low self-concept and exhibit self-contempt. An examination of African American students in elite preparatory schools, unlike their urban and suburban counterparts in other schools had an internal locus of control and attributed their potential future success to hard work (Cookson & Persell, 1992). The students in the preparatory schools represent all levels of socioeconomic status, but the majority of their parents are doctors, lawyers, educators, and a small percentage of blue collar workers (Cookson and Persell, 1992). This supports Taylor's point that middle class African Americans are more confident in their ability to deal with negative stereotypes.

To help us effectively deal with young African American males, we can learn how older African American males cope with stressful situations. Young African American males are less likely to understand external stressors. As a result they find methods to cope. We may help them effectively deal with negative life situations if we have an understanding of their cultural and societal expectations. Hall (1981) found the following:

> The American culture and its subsocieties do not expect the Black male to exhibit emotions and feelings about his or his family's life situation and the dire impact that society may have on him when he tries to live up to these unrealistic expectations. 'A man ain't suppose to cry' is one of the cardinal rules governing

> the emotions of Black men; they are expected to illustrate manly strength and confidence. If the emotions of a man are restrained, how is he to express sadness, pain, loneliness, and isolation? Through the proper socialization process, Black men learn that activities conducted for recreational purposes can be and are an acceptable outlet for the deep-seated emotional and visceral feelings that they may have but feel prohibited to release. (p. 162)

Hall further revealed that African American men generally find a subgroup that allows them to defuse their tensions. Generally, that subgroup is experiencing similar problems and can identify with the need to vent, particularly in a supportive environment.

In his phenomenological study of the communication styles of African American males, Orbe (1993) found that regardless of their age, intelligence, or accomplishments, African American men believed that they will always be in a 'white man's world.' This view illustrates a coping mechanism for some African American males since their everyday lives are surrounded with experiences which confirm that view. Orbe concluded that:

> One aspect of being an African American man in this society involves, as the old Negro spiritual declares "keeping your eyes on the prize." However, the sad reality is that "prize"--one created, maintained, and allocated by the dominant society--is one that forever escapes African American men. (p. 134)

Understanding and believing that the "prize" is "created, maintained, and allocated" by white people is another coping mechanism and was evident in Brothers. According to Monroe and Goldman (1988):

> When opportunity revealed itself, a chance for success followed, and in 1969 Vest Monroe was on his way to Harvard after three years at a prestigious Rhode Island boarding school. "I was pleased that I was showing what black boys were capable of," Vest said. "Yet somehow, it seemed, attending St. George's made me a good Negro in their eyes, while those left in Robert Taylor [a housing project] were bad Negroes or, at the very least, inferior Negroes" . . . Vest had learned that being born black, no matter where he went or what he achieved, there would always be the inescapable fact of his blackness. When he finally went home to Robert Taylor, he knew he had never left. (p. 114)

In other words, even though an African American male may have excelled academically or professionally, he must remember that he is always just an African American man to those who view African American males as inferior.

For some, the term coping mechanism is used. For others, a stronger term, survival strategies is used. While survival strategies may be difficult for young black males, strategies for overcoming the effects of racism can be found through the experiences of successful African American males. Historian John H. Franklin provided insight regarding his survival as a scholar in a conversation with Willie (1986). Dr. Franklin told Willie that in order to survive as scholar, "he must also survive as a man--as a black man . . . the black scholar must perform a dual role-practicing scholarship that adheres to the highest standards in the field, and advocating justice and equality" (p. 21). This dual approach, according to Willie (1986) will enable the black academician "to be heard as a scholar and to survive as a human being" (p. 21).

There is wide agreement in the African American community that one of the most difficult and dangerous situations for African American males to survive dealing with police officers. A white man may be allowed to verbally disagree with a police officer, but African American male's disagreement may be viewed differently by police and can be dangerous. According to Grier & Cobb (1968), "the child must know that the white world is dangerous . . . if he does not understand its rules, it may kill him" (p. 61).

Contending with challenging conditions at school; experiences with racism; being viewed as inferior, worthless and dangerous; being discriminated against economically and in the workforce; and the historical debate between Washington and DuBois sketch a partial, if not holistic, view of African American males. We note these experiences have caused many problems in the lives of African American males and that they create coping mechanisms in response to the problems. Research studies have attempted to identify the source of those problems and to formulate recommendations to improve their lives. Unfortunately, most of those studies conducted about African Americans and African American males in particular have been pathologically focused. That is, they have largely concluded that African Americans are abnormal and their own deficiencies are the sole cause of their problems. The studies usually only identify negative attributes and seldom identify the strengths of African American culture. We turn to a brief look at research on African Americans.

Research and Other Literature on African Americans

Early Research

A review of the literature reveals that most research regarding African Americans has been pathologically focused and does not consider the interrelationships of African American men and their social, historical, political, and economic contexts. Both researchers and consumers of research interpret findings and judge them or conclude that the human studies are normal or pathological. Pathological, the adjectival form of pathology means to be caused by disease, and refers to being disordered in behavior (Webster's II New Riverside College Dictionary, 1988). Most commonly used in the medical field, we see the application of it in educational settings as well.

Many studies have also been positivistic and do not view subjects in their social, historical, political, and economic contexts. The studies are anchored in the reality of the researcher who attempts to maintain a neutral, detached stance. Recommendations for practice and policy regarding African Americans have been heavily influenced by this research approach. Thus, a multitude of generalizations and subsequent policy-driven initiatives about African American males may have done more harm than good because those generalizations were largely formed by detached researchers whose realities were different from the boys and men's who were studied and without consideration of their lived experiences from a holistic perspective. More is noted about positivistic research in a later section.

Two monumental studies (Myrdal, 1944; Moynihan, 1965) are examples of research that contributed much to the knowledge base regarding African Americans, but

carry pathological connotations. In 1944, Myrdal published, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy. This work was seen as the definitive scholarship on the condition of African Americans in America at the time. According to Myrdal (1944), "We assume that it is to the advantage of American Negroes as individuals and as a group to become assimilated into American culture, to acquire the traits held in esteem by the dominant white Americans" (p. 929). Myrdal believed that African Americans were inferior and believed the answer to their problems to be adopting the values of white Americans. This is a distinct example of pathologically-focused research in as much as the implications of Myrdal's recommendations are rooted in Ethnocentrism or the belief that white American culture is the ideal culture and that those who were not of the white American culture should strive to assimilate.

Though well-intended, Moynihan's (1965) work, The Negro Family: The Case for National Action, sparked an immediate push by African American scholars to contradict all research that failed to see any strengths of African Americans. Believing that African Americans could not solve their own problems, Moynihan asserted that oppressive conditions had left African Americans in such distress that only a national effort could solve their problems. African American scholars sought to point out the strengths instead of weaknesses of African American families.

In 1968, the Kerner Commission Report described the United States as having two different societies, one black and one white. Perhaps the different perspective of scholars is one justification for the Kerner Commission's Report. But the finding that their are two different societies is relevant in the 20th century. Decades later, Hacker

(1992) described the United States as having two separate nations in Two Nations:Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal. The research community is not isolated in the analysis of two separate nations in the United States. Pathologically focused research is commonplace. I am not suggesting that studies which identify problems are not useful. However, a review of the literature indicates that most research about African American males is indeed pathologically focused and therefore, collectively the literature is inadequate.

Recent Research

In order to understand what African American males tell us, an awareness of how others have found them to be is important. We have seen a plethora of studies focusing on African American males and their disproportionate representation in all of the wrong categories. Many of these studies are included in two bibliographies regarding research on African American males. One is Evans, & Whitfield. (1988) Black Males in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography from 1967 to 1987. The epistemological basis of the studies is largely positivistic. Studies are categorized in the following areas: psychometrics, experimental psychology (human), physiological psychology, communication systems, developmental psychology, social processes and social issues, experimental social psychology, personality, physical and psychological disorders, treatment and prevention, professional personnel and professional issues, educational psychology, and applied psychology.

The other text, Murry, V.M. & Winter, G. (1990), Black Adolescence: Current Issues and Annotated Bibliography, includes a multitude of research in curriculum,

programs, and teaching methods; academic learning and achievement, classroom dynamics, student adjustment, and attitudes; special and remedial education; and counseling and measurement. It includes research on African American males and females.

Some of the studies found in these two bibliographies include those measuring achievement deficiencies (DeBord, 1977), class and race differences (Hall, Huppertz, and Levi, 1977; Marsh, 1975), and motivation (Hall, Merkel, Howe, and Lederman, 1986; Varadi, 1974). Many focused specifically on the role of the family, parental absence (mainly female-headed households) and its effect on academic achievement (Bowman and Howard, 1985; Fowler and Richards, 1978; Jantz and Sciara, 1975; Scheinfeld, 1983; Woodard, 1985). Some focused on academic achievement differences due to gender and race (Jones, 1984) and reading abilities (Doepner, 1975; Mangieri and Olsen, 1977). A great deal of research has been focused on non-intellectual factors and achievement (Ellis, 1975; Fordham, 1988; Grannis, Fahs, and Bethea, 1988; Hall, 1977; Sobota, 1969; Zlotnick, 1976).

The examples noted above illustrate the enormous number of studies about African American males which has been largely based on the physical science model of research. Unfortunately, research participants' voices are not heard in these types of studies.

Research Focused on Strengths in the African American Community

The early 1990's brought about a broadening in the epistemological bases of research regarding African American males and their opportunity to significantly

contribute as co-researchers in studies. The works of Barnes, (1992) and Polite, (1992; 1994) allowed African American males to provide voice to research studies. There has also been a change in the assumptions some researchers hold about the pathology of African Americans. Some other work (Ghee, 1990; Lee, 1996; Mitchell, 1990; Turner, 1990; White Hood, 1994) about African American males have not been as pathologically focused as earlier research and, instead, offered information on their strengths as well as problems.

African American scholars made major efforts to refute pathologically-focused research after Moynihan's (1965), The Negro Family: The Case for National Action was published. Three years later, Andrew Billingsley (1968), wrote Black Families in White America, and then in 1992 wrote Climbing Jacob's Ladder. The latter book shows how African American families have endured from slavery to the 20th century. It builds on strengths of African American families and provides recommendations for those working with African Americans to provide viable options for improving their lives. In the foreword to Climbing Jacob's Ladder, Giddings points out that "even poor, inner-city black families are far from the monolith that Moynihanian-influenced studies and television documentaries reduce them to" (p. 14). Another source, Black Self-Determination, by V.P. Franklin (1984) documents experiences of African Americans relative to black unity, resistance, and freedom. Anderson's (1988), The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935 brilliantly illustrates how blacks pursued education despite the challenges posed by politics, power, and ideology.

Other works which focused on strengths instead of weaknesses and on empowerment strategies include: Strengths of Black Families (Hill, 1972); Strengths: African American Children and Families (Hilliard, 1982); The Black Community: Diversity and Unity (Blackwell, 1985); The Toughest Assignment: Empowering Our Children (Doherty, 1992); Maggie's American Dream: The Life and Times of a Black Family (Comer, 1988); and The Black Family: Strengths, Self-Help and Positive Change (Logan, 1996). Wideman and Preston (1996), offer a collection of poems and essays by African American males that beautifully presents their voices and strengths. The contributions these authors provide are immeasurable. Collectively, they illustrate strong kindship bonds and work orientation, the importance of religion and education in the African American community and self-determination in meeting goals and coping with life's challenges.

Summary

This chapter presented background information regarding the lives of African American males so that lived experiences may be better understood. A holistic approach to research was emphasized to avoid a focus on only one aspect of their lives. Research which gives voice to them helps us understand their experiences from their perspective. In this chapter, we noted African American males' experience with racism, how they are viewed as inferior, worthless, and dangerous and their experiences with employment and economic discrimination. Next, the historical debate about the kind and purpose of education for African Americans between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois was highlighted. The chapter also described some coping mechanisms African American

males use to survive these negative experiences. Finally, the chapter included information to illustrate how research about African American males has evolved since the 19th century. Most of the research was pathologically focused and blamed African Americans for their problems. However, the chapter also noted that we are beginning to see research which focus on strengths in the African American community.

My broadest purpose here is to provide background information to improve our ability to understand what African American males can tell us. Hopefully, this improvement will strengthen our care and our ability to work them in educational settings.

Chapter Three

Investigating Educational Experiences of African American Males

This chapter describes the processes used to investigate the lived educational experiences of nine African American male inmates. More specifically, the chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach, phenomenology used to conduct the research. It also includes how I oriented myself to the phenomenon of investigating their lived experiences, selected participants for the research project, obtained descriptive accounts of their lived experiences, analyzed and developed the four themes and determined the relationships among the themes. The chapter concludes by highlighting the usefulness of this research.

Phenomenology

This research study is interpretive and uses phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology is rooted in the work of 19th century German philosophers of Husserl, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer in Germany, Kierkegaard in Scandinavia, and Sartre, Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty in France (Hultgren, 1989).

Van Manen (1990) describes phenomenological research as the study of everyday lived experiences and the meaning we construct from them. A phenomenological researcher questions the experiences of the world and wants to know the world as we live in it. By researching, questioning and theorizing the way we know the world we attach ourselves to it and better become a part of that world. Therefore, phenomenology becomes a caring act (Van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology always seeks to find out what an experience is like (Van Manen, 1990). As I gaze on African American male inmates, I question what their experiences are like. What is the everyday life of African American males in school like? Are their experiences different from others'? How are their school experiences similar to their lived experiences outside of school? How do they describe their favorite teachers? How do they describe their favorite subjects? Answers to these questions help to gain insightful descriptions of their experiences. Phenomenology does not provide us with conclusions that can be generalized and used for purposes of predicting and controlling African American males in schools. Rather, phenomenology will bring us closer to an understanding of their experiences.

For many, this methodology is a new way of thinking. But, according to Van Manen (1990) phenomenology is also old:

> It is new in the sense that modern thinking and scholarship is so caught up in theoretical and technological thought that the program of a phenomenological human science may strike an individual as a breakthrough and a liberation. It is old in the sense that, over the ages, human beings have invented artistic, philosophic, communal, mimetic and poetic languages that have sought to (re)unite them with the ground of their lived experience. (p. 9)

As I conducted this research I found out what meanings African American male inmates gave to their experiences, then I expressed them in phenomenological writing. Van Manen calls this a poetizing activity.

Phenomenological research is about understanding the participant's experiences from his or her perspective. The researcher's experiences and perspectives must be thoughtfully acknowledged and then put aside so that learning can take place from the participant (McClelland, 1995). Furthermore, the concern of phenomenological research is "with subjective constructions of realities" (Srinivasan, 1989), not an objective reality. Regarding the African American male inmates, I sought to uncover and reflect their subjectively constructed reality regarding schools.

Assumptions about phenomenological research and the educational experiences of African American male inmates inform this study. Four essential ones are (a) African American males have constructed their meaning of school in a racist, cultural context, (b) the inmates will truthfully share their experiences, (c) the inmates seek meaning in their lives and (d) multiple realities exist regarding the education of African American male inmates. These assumptions are based on writings (Hultgren, 1989 and Van Manen, 1990) about phenomenology.

In order to grasp and portray the African American male inmates' reality, it was essential that I, the researcher, and the inmates have some shared experiences. According to Srinivasan (1989) "the act of interpretative research envisages an elusive yet powerful link between the precategorical reality of the researcher and of the respondent regarding the topic of research on hand" (p. 68). My lived experience as an African American woman and as a mother, daughter, sister, aunt, friend and cousin of African American males and my knowledge of theory intermingles with the educational experiences of African American male inmates in a potentially forceful way. We share the experience of

having been African American children in integrated schools. This shared experience and my relationships with African American men was necessary for me to identify the main themes and to make them rich and relevant. In addition to shared experiences, I needed further orientation to the participants, setting, and phenomenon being studied.

Orienting to the Phenomenon

There were four main activities which helped me orient to the educational experiences of incarcerated African American males: (a) conducting a small project with university students, (b) facilitating a book discussion within the correctional facility where the research was conducted, (c) conducting focus group interviews at a women's correctional facility, and (d) working part-time in the correctional facility where the research was conducted. Because I was unfamiliar with correctional facilities, I made special efforts to orient to the setting and participants as well as the phenomenon under study, the educational experiences of African American males.

Interviewing College Men

I interviewed three African American freshmen for a project I was doing for a class, nine months prior to beginning this study. Interviews about their educational experiences were conducted as a group discussion. The two sessions lasted two hours each. This small project was very useful for my dissertation, because it provided an opportunity for the interview questions to be rehearsed. Their response solidified my judgement that relevant questions were being asked. The participants indicated that they were comfortable with the questions. The project was also useful because my interviewing skills were improved with the opportunity to practice. Specifically, I

improved my responses, clarification, and follow up techniques. I was also able to practice using the cassette tape recorder and the transcription equipment.

The participants indicated that they appreciated the intent of the research study because no one had ever asked them how they felt about their educational experiences. They felt that I was concerned about their lives and their education. The participants eagerly responded to the questions with a great deal of meditation and care. This project was successful.

Facilitating a Book Discussion Group for Inmates

The second opportunity to orient to the phenomenon was my facilitation of a book discussion for inmates at a correctional facility. The initial contact was a discussion with the State of Minnesota Correctional Education Director. I was then introduced to and met with the Education Coordinator at the facility. Following our discussion, I met the warden and was asked to explain my interest in facilitating the book discussion group and conducting the research study. I was welcomed to join the facility as a resource volunteer and subsequently attended a new employee orientation. Later, I met the education clerk (an inmate) who assisted with screening the participants and participated in each session of the book discussion as well as the research study.

Flyers were posted throughout the facility to recruit participants to the book discussion group. Inmates were instructed to respond by sending a request form to the education coordinator. The final approval of their participation, based on requirements of the correctional facility, was made by the education coordinator. The inmates were chosen on the basis of their interest in participating in the book discussion group and their

anticipated cooperation and conduct during the research interviews. Twelve copies of Makes Me Wanna Holler, by Nathan McCall (1994) were purchased by the State Corrections Department of Education Director and at the conclusion of the discussion group's work were donated to the correctional facility's library.

During the initial information meeting regarding the book discussion, most of the inmates were skeptical of my intentions, so building rapport was important. I made it clear that I hoped that this research could be shared with those who work with my African American male child, their children and others. The following is an abstract from my journal written about the informational session regarding the book discussion and the explanation of the research study. The meeting took place on April 18, 1995.

> My southern accent was detected immediately. Where are you from? one inmate asked. I smiled and asked him if he detected a different accent. Yes, so what part of the south are you from? he asked. I'm from Alabama. Oh, well I'm from Tennessee another one said. I'm from Nebraska, I'm from Montgomery, I'm from Arkansas. There seemed to have been an immediate connection and sense of comfort with me. I was concerned about telling them that personal side of me. Do I really want them to know where I'm from? The research would benefit from our having a trusting relationship. However, I must remember to draw the line.
>
> One inmate asked a chilling question about African American students having problems with schooling in terms of the "white philosophy" and what they can get out of their classes. I interpreted the phrase to suggest that he believed that public school is based on white history and their values. He continued, I'm asking this because I barely graduated from high school, but I did not get anything out of the experience. They wanted me to be what they prescribed and did not encourage me to advance to higher level occupations. How do other African Americans view this situation? I admitted that I don't have all of the answers, but I could say that the experiences are different for different people.
>
> Another inmate seemed to have a solid understanding of the psychology of racism and how white people view him. He said, sometimes if I am

> sweeping the floors, they will stand in my way instead of moving. I'm sure that they are just waiting for me to say, excuse me sirs, madams again and again. If I were to become agitated and say something in a mean tone, they can say see I told you that he was an angry black man. They pick situations to label you.
>
> I told the inmates that I would be interviewing undergraduate African American male students and some professional men one day about their educational experiences too. They seemed happy that I wasn't just singling them out for a study. I pointed out that they are part of the whole picture. We seemed to have a good dialogue.

The fourteen inmates, approved by the educational director, and I met once a week for two hours April through June 1995 to discuss the book, Makes Me Wanna Holler. That experience reinforced for me the need to conduct this research study and my commitment to do so.

It was also helpful to have had conversations with my advisor and another professor about prison culture. The other professor had an extensive background conducting literacy programs in correctional facilities. She and I discussed particulars about being a female in a male facility. We also discussed possible issues related to being an African American woman within the facility. It was helpful to have read Makes Me Wanna Holler since the author made comments regarding his life as an inmate and statements about female employees. In addition, the education coordinator as well as the warden discussed particulars about gender issues. For example, I was reminded that accepting gifts or small favors from inmates was in violation of facility rules. It was pointed out that accepting gifts would give inmates the impression that they could also request favors. This exchange of favors can quickly shift to a psychological dependance on each other and lead to contraband or other problems.

Conducting Focus Group Interviews with Female Inmates

A third process of orienting to the phenomena was my volunteering to assist with two focus group sessions at a women's correctional facility during the summer of 1995. This was helpful because I was able to observe interviewing techniques, questioning and re-questioning participants. During the first session, the focus group facilitator was late. I took the initiative to start the session by building rapport with the women. I explained the purpose of the focus group discussion, answered questions, and eased fears regarding confidentiality issues. My familiarity with the men's correctional facility significantly helped the process along according to the facilitator who had never been inside a prison. In turn, helping facilitate these sessions increased my understanding of what it is like to be incarcerated.

Working in the Correctional Facility

The fourth process of orienting to the phenomena was my working part-time in the correctional facility, coordinating a program and teaching where the research was conducted. This position was unrelated to the research and occurred following the completion of the book discussion. I was not viewed as simply a university researcher whose main responsibility was to interview them a couple of times, then leave. I frequently talked with the inmates in my study. If they had spoken about an injury or a particular concern, I would inquire about their concern the next time that I saw them. Our conversations were mainly related to the status of their educational projects. These mere chats (Van Manen, 1990) produced mutual trust which aided in the development of

a sense of caring and an orientation to the notion of discussions about their educational experiences. These conversations helped to stimulate an interest in the research topic.

Selecting Participants for the Research Project

During the informational meeting of the book discussion group at the men's correctional facility, the inmates were informed about the length and number of the sessions. We also discussed rules for the sessions and the research study which I planned to conduct at the facility for my dissertation.

Regarding the research study, they were provided with the following information: (a) the study would take place upon approval by The Human Subjects in Research Committee at the University of Minnesota and following completion of the book discussion, (b) their participation in both the book discussion and research study were optional, and (c) they would not receive any rewards for the study. However, I told them I would seek approval to provide certificates of appreciation for participation. I explained the methodology to them in lay terms.

Participants were identified from volunteers who participated the book discussion. Two others who were attending mandatory release classes during the time of the book discussions wanted to participate in the research study and were allowed to do so. Nine African American male inmates were selected to participate in the study.

The participants ranged in age from 21 and 55 years of age. Their educational levels ranged from junior high school dropouts to a college graduate. Their reading levels ranged from second grade to college level. It is unusual for an inmate to have a college reading level, but the oldest participant is serving a life sentence and has been taking

college courses since his early twenties. Their sentences varied, but ranged from four years to life.

Van Manen, (1990) indicates that researchers conducting hermeneutic interviews notice that participants are intently interested in the research subject. The inmates selected for this study were concerned about learning more about their educational experiences. Some of them often spoke about wanting to do something to "help the little fellows," a phrase one inmate used to refer to African American boys. Participating in this study became a moral obligation to some of them. Meanwhile, as the researcher, I felt increasingly obligated to carry the project through to completion. The awareness of their level of interest and care and their trust in me to be their voice produced a friendship that strengthened the conversations. As a result, they were not just willing participants, but were coinvestigators. We were equally interested in carrying out the study.

Processes in this Phenomenological Study

There are three main processes in conducting this phenomenological study: (a) obtaining descriptive accounts of lived experiences, (b) analyze the text to reveal the themes, and (c) finding the relationships among themes and interpreting the themes to reveal a central theme.

Obtaining Descriptive Accounts of the Coinvestigators' Lived Experiences

Interviews were the means by which I obtained accounts of the coinvestigators' schooling experiences. The interviewing process took place September 1995 through April 1997, but no interviewing took place between September 1996 and March 1997. Those who know little about prison life may assume inmates are readily available for

interviews, but in fact, they are not. Three coinvestigators in this group were being released by January 1996. Of these three, two were interviewed three times; one was interviewed four times. They were interviewed within a three month period to get their stories before they left the facility. Because the co-investigator who was interviewed four times was about to be released, he had difficulty focusing during the first two sessions. The two additional sessions were necessary to get a better understanding of his experiences. The remaining coinvestigators were interviewed over a longer period of time allowing for more thought and interpretation as I collected their stories.

Face to face, individual interviews were selected for this study because this approach is well suited to phenomenological research. Phenomenological interviews are conversational and the participants are involved in an interpersonal engagement (Polkinghorne, 1993) with the interviewer. Indepth interviews also provide each co-investigator the freedom and flexibility to tell their stories in their own words (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Flexibility is important in the interviewing process, yet it is also important to maintain the topic of the study (Van Manen, 1990).

My interviews had more structure than Polkinghorne (1993) would suggest. They were semi-structured because I wanted to be certain that all participants provided similar information. I also found most of the coinvestigators did not talk expansively. Rather, they required prompting and invitation to keep talking about their schooling experiences. Each interview lasted from one hour to one and a half hours. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed to create texts.

The interviews occurred in classrooms, the education coordinator's office, and the library within the Education Department at the correctional facility. Although there were other teachers and a guard present in the department, the interviews were private.

In order to facilitate a caring and trusting atmosphere before the interviews began, a general protocol was used. Each co-investigator was provided an opportunity to discuss any issues of concern. This allowed them to ventilate any concerns which may have otherwise prevented them from focusing during the interview.

Once the coinvestigators were oriented, I started the interviews. During the first interview, the following questions were employed to become familiar with their educational experiences:

Where did you go to elementary school?
- Can you describe what the buildings, rooms, and playgrounds were like?
- What did you like most about that/those schools?
- What did you like least about that/those schools?
- What classes did you like and were you best at?
- What classes did you not like?
- Were you excited about school at that age?
- Do you remember what you wanted to be when you grew up at that age?
- What were your teachers like? Tell me about the ones you liked most. Tell me about those that you didn't like.
- How were you treated by teachers and principals? By other students?
- What was your most pleasant experience in elementary school?
- What was your most unpleasant experience in elementary school?

Did you ever drop out of school?
- If so, at what grade?
- Why did you quit going to school?

Tell me about your Junior High School.
- What did you like most about that/those schools?
- What did you like least about that/those schools?
- What classes did you like and were you best at?
- What was your most pleasant experience in Junior High school?
- What was your most unpleasant experience in Junior High school?
- Did you find Junior High School difficult? Why?

Spontaneous questions were asked to clarify their responses as it was necessary in the first interview. After the first interviews, I transcribed the tapes, read the texts, and then returned for second and third interviews. I asked questions to seek a deeper understanding of experiences such as the following: During our first interview, you indicated that you were embarrassed by the teacher when you threw up in the classroom. What did the teacher say to embarrass you? Can you describe how that situation made you feel?

When the themes were well developed, I returned to the facility in the spring of 1997 and was able to interview three of the coinvestigators for the last time. All the others had been transferred to other facilities, released, or were on work release programs. The three were interviewed individually. I checked to see if they agreed with the themes, if the themes expressed their schooling experiences. They indicated that they were accurate. This last interview allowed me to attempt a check of intersubjective agreement (Van Manen, 1990) although the number of coinvestigators able to respond was quite limited.

One more note about the tone of the interviews and openness to the phenomenon being studied. There was the need to open myself to the educational experiences of African American male inmates. The nature of their crimes, for example, is not relevant to understanding their schooling experiences. In fact, I did not seek information regarding their crimes nor information regarding their psychological profiles. They had trained therapists within the facility to focus on those areas. It is the essence of their educational experiences that is important in this phenomenological study. I asked

questions with the same intensity of a parent who is concerned about their child's experiences. The coinvestigators knew my openness and my caring. Without my saying so, they felt and trusted that I care for them.

In an earlier the section, I mentioned that one inmate was interviewed four times. When my advisor and I discussed his inability to focus and settle into a conversation, we decided that if the third interview wasn't useful, then I would not be able to use his interviews in the study. It was his recognition of my true openness that I believe was the turning point in our conversations.

During a conversation, he mentioned that he was raised in the church, was raised in a good family, and that he respected me as a woman. He repeated these and similar phrases several times. When I noticed that he was very nervous, I decided to ask him about his mother in an effort to demonstrate my sincere concern and to ease the tension I sensed he felt. In a previous conversation he had mentioned that his mother suffered from high blood pressure and had been ill. I asked him how his mother was doing. He mentioned that he had spoken to her and she was feeling better. I stated that his name appeared to have been carefully selected by his mother and wondered if he knew the origin of his name. I continued to state that from my opinion, his mother loved him very much because she calls frequently. His eyes began to water. I noticed him fighting back the tears while talking for about two minutes. Finally, he broke down and cried. I was terribly surprised, but allowed him the release. He went on to say that even though he had asked for forgiveness for his crime, he was very ashamed. He was ashamed because his mother raised him the best way that she could. He agreed with me that she loved him

very much. He told me about his crime; he had raped a woman. His inability to focus during the interview was based on his perception of my opinion of his crime. He was unaware that I did not know what his crime was. I acknowledged that I was not aware of the crime and that my focus was on his educational experiences. As a result of our open and personal exchange, his third and fourth interviews were quite rich.

Uncovering the Themes

The second process in the phenomenological inquiry is reducing the themes. According to Van Manen (1990), "Theme analysis refers to the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meaning and imagery of the work" (p. 78). The themes of the coinvestigators' stories are the structures of their experience. A theme is the focus of a particular expressed experience or experiences. When the transcripts were read, a theme was developed from an understanding of the vernacular, their life experiences, and my care for them and the topic. Themes may be understood as a simplification of the larger process of initially reading the transcripts.

According to Van Manen (1990), there are three approaches to uncovering thematic aspects of a text: (a) "the wholistic or sententious approach, (b) the selective or highlighting approach, and (c) the detailed or line-by-line approach" (p. 92-93). The wholistic or sententious approach was used. The text was analyzed to determine what the themes were and the patterns that made up the experience. Developing the themes involved describing experiences that could not be captured in theoretical ideas.

A theme is not something that can easily or quickly be extracted from the transcripts. The process of uncovering a theme is tedious and requires much thought and

decision making. What is recognized as a theme to one person may not be a theme to another person. There is a need to be immersed in the essence of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990) and to read and reread the text created from the interviews over and over in order to grasp themes.

An example of being immersed in the essence of the phenomenon occurred in October, 1995. I had interviewed and transcribed the tape of an inmate who discussed his early placement in special education. He felt that his choice of friends probably led him to prison and that he chose friends who were like him in school. Later in the interview, he indicated that his friends in special education classes ended up being his friends in the streets. They skipped classes together, dropped out of school at the same time, and planned and executed robberies together. I did not see the significance of what he had told me until March 1996. At 2:30, A.M. one morning, I woke from my sleep and instantly thought about the contents of that interview. The inmate did not articulate it, but I thought the school placing him in special education in the second grade with other students with similar academic achievement, imposed a disadvantage on him. His experience seemed congruent with Hare's (1987) belief that, if the experiences in school are negative, youth will turn to their peers to find positive support. if his group was later described as a gang, then the gang-like comrade began in his second grade special education class.

More experienced researchers may have been able to grasp the connection sooner, but several streams of thought had to come together for me. In this example, knowledge gained from my lived experiences, the literature, and graduate coursework assisted in

identifying the significance of this aspect of his lived experience. These streams of thought contributed to the development of the theme "Feeling Like I'm on the Outside Looking In."

The example cited above reflects a phenomenological quality identified by Van Manen (1990). There was a need to make sense of the lived experience of being in "special education with people who were just like me." Perhaps, the inmate unknowingly wanted to make sense of some of the factors that led to his incarceration. He was not aware of themes, nor the need to make sense of an experience in order to capture its essence. His part of this process was his willingness to reflect on his lived school experiences and to participate in answering interview questions. This is supported by his trust in me as the researcher to present an accurate summary of his experiences. Douglas and Johnson (1977) believe that the effectiveness of phenomenological research is evident when we find meaning in something that had seemed irrelevant earlier. In addition, they say "by doing this, we reveal meanings that are not actually apparent to the uncritical mind but which nonetheless are present at some other level of consciousness" (p. 282).

Rich interviews are important to create text where the essence of the experience can be grasped in themes. In the process of thematic analysis related to the example related earlier, I was struggling to understand what the experience of being "in second grade special education with people like me" meant to one African American male inmate. "Theme is the means to get at the notion" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 88) of what that educational experience was like. Getting to know the coinvestigators and knowing

something about them increases the accuracy of the interpretation of their lived experiences (Hirsh, 1967).

I read the text created from the first three coinvestigators who were released early in the study and from the first round of interviewing the other coinvestigators. I listed 47 topics which I detected and categorized according to similarity and by individual co-investigator. The second round of interviews probed these topics.

Text from all the interviews were reread and reviewed. Some of the topics were redundant and were combined with other topics or became subtopics. Other topics were unrelated to educational experiences and thus they were omitted (Lanigan, 1979). The four themes that were selected appeared consistently throughout my review of the grouped topics. Ultimately, the themes were determined by separating those that were not essential (Lanigan, 1979).

Finding Relationships Among the Themes

Finally, I considered the four themes, pondering their interrelationships. The intent was to determine how the themes connected and to identify a central theme that illustrates the connections. The latter is intended to "conjoin related concepts and ideas" (Orbe, 1993). The coming together of themes marks a turning point in conducting phenomenological research. For me this was a thematic connection; it indicated a central, interrelationship among themes. Prior to the thematic connection, the mere words in the transcripts were disparate and lacked significance. The transcripts were as perplexing as assembling pieces of a puzzle without a picture as a guide. The pieces of the puzzle are scattered and unconnected. Once those pieces are properly assembled, there is a sense of

recognition and completion. The puzzle then represents a completed picture and perhaps tells a story.

The lived educational experiences of the nine African American male inmates were separate and scattered. Their experiences took place in seven different states and in various time frames. However, their experiences are connected in part by class, gender and race. What has emerged are themes that represent the wholeness of their experiences. Understanding the wholeness is central to understanding their being (Heidegger, 1962) in the world. While I experienced a sense of closure after the development and checking of the themes with some of the coinvestigators, there can be no finalization of reductions (Nelson, 1989).

Usefulness of This Research

The aim of phenomenological research is to bring forth an awareness of the vast array of lived experiences and to look for new possibilities (Hultgren, 1989). The participant's voice in their vernacular is instrumental in providing the awareness. As a result, professionals who want to help can be more focused and attentive to others who have similar experiences (Hutgren, 1989). Hopefully, this study can bring forth new awareness of how African American male inmates experience school. Perhaps I and others can become more sensitive to African American males in school. In addition, maybe public policy can be informed and even amended, so that we become more responsive to distinct situations (Polkinghorne, 1989) regarding the education of African American males.

Chapter Four

Getting to Know the Coinvestigators

Imprisoned people are a population that researchers often study but seldom listen to. I was eager to listen to the coinvestigators because I believed that they had much to tell us about their experiences in school. The positivistic studies I found focused on African American males but did not tell their stories about school from their perspective.

I do not claim to have been free of hesitancy regarding entering the correctional facility. I understood that dangers lie within a medium security facility and that there would be some risk involved in studying inmates. For example, I had been pre-warned that some inmates are able to convince unsuspecting individuals to perform illegal acts such as carrying contraband into a facility and about how they prey on female employees. I was reluctant, yet I decided that there was important work to be done there. This decision was made after daily conversations with God, as I questioned my decision to conduct research in a correctional facility. Finally, a still voice reminded me that it was a thief who was the last person Jesus saved, while hanging on the cross. The same still voice reminded me of a biblical scripture that indicates our responsibility to remember the imprisoned.

As I entered the facility on the first day of the book discussion, I remember asking God for protection. I also remember asking that my interactions with the inmates and the data I collected would enlighten those working with African American males--that they would learn to work with these brothers with more care and concern. At that moment, I felt a shield of protection, protection that I felt each time I entered the facility. Though I

was watchful within the facility, I conducted my research without fear. I do not believe the inmates detected fear and I believe that this was beneficial in my getting to know them and in obtaining rich data from them.

Extending Myself to Get Acquainted With the Coinvestigators

I paid special attention to how I would be in the prison. I tried to be clear about the study and my motives for conducting the research. They understood my concern for African American males, and they understood that their participation in the study could make a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge about schooling of African American children. Several indicated that they had participated in research studies prior to this one. However, it was understood that the findings of this study would be a result of their stories and would be presented in their words. Their understanding of the purpose of the research study increased their ease and comfort in participating. The latter made it easier for me to get to know them.

The first decision that I made increased my ability to get acquainted with the coinvestigators. I decided early that I would not find out what crimes they committed. The main reason for this was that I wanted them to speak without their fear of my judging them. I believed that a nonjudgmental stance was proper because they had already been tried and sentenced. This relieved them and made them more comfortable around me. I suspected that they would already be embarrassed by the fact that they were prisoners, and talking about their crimes could exacerbate it.

When they learned that I was from Alabama, several inmates indicated that an inmate who had just left the facility was from Alabama. When they called his name, I

realized that not only did I know the man, we attended the same high school and grew up in the same community. That conversation and others we had about people I knew who had gone to jail or to prison increased their comfort with me.

Another factor that increased my ability to get to know them was my effort to treat each of them with respect. I always greeted them by name and offered to shake their hands. I was sensitive to their schedules, i.e. dinner or other prior engagements. I attempted to keep the interviews less than one hour in length, but if they ran longer, I apologized. I made special attempts to remember specific information they shared regarding their release dates, family matters, or other important aspects in their lives. Remembering this information allowed me to follow-up as a matter of concern for them and they appreciated it.

In addition, I was aware of my status as a female and of the lack of African American female volunteers in the facility. I did not wear makeup or perfume into the facility. My manner of dress was rather conservative. If I wore dresses, they were not tight, short or revealing. Sometimes I wore jeans and big sweaters. We very seldom joked about anything unless they recalled something funny from their experiences. None of the inmates alluded to my sexuality. I felt respected by them. Respect for each other was important in getting to know them and of them getting to know me.

Being Sensitive and Listening is Key to Getting to Know Them

The opportunity to share their experiences rekindled their memories that had been buried long ago. Several coinvestigators indicated that they had not thought about specific incidences for quite some time. All of them indicated that no one had ever asked

them about their experiences. For all of us, it was a journey, one that we embarked on with commitment. As I entered the facility as a researcher, I did not expect to become at times their friend, counselor, teacher, or advisor. My main role was that of a listener and a facilitator. In fact, I avoided offering them advice and reminded them of the resources available to them within the institution. Because they trusted my intentions regarding the research and were comfortable with me, experiences outside their educational experiences often entered the conversation. I believe that it was my stance as a listener that enabled them to recall memories and to discuss them openly.

The descriptions of the nine inmates who participated in this study, are based on my subjective view of their physical characteristics, personalities, school histories, and other distinguishing factors about them. Neither their psychological profiles nor their crimes are presented. They came from Tennessee, Illinois, Nebraska, Minnesota, Michigan, and Indiana. In many respects they were alike, and yet in significant ways they were unique.

Introducing the Coinvestigators

Co-Investigator Number One

The first inmate that I met was instrumental in helping to screen participants for the Makes Me Wanna Holler, (McCall, 1994) book discussion group. He is about 6'4 feet tall and weighs more than 250 pounds. His glasses made him look especially studious. We were introduced by the Education Director who shared my intentions with him. I had never sat in a room with an inmate before and I felt awkward. I am embarrassed to say that I did not know quite how to relate to him. Although I was not afraid of him, I did not

expect him to be as intelligent as he is. He is fifty three years old and has been incarcerated since the late sixties. He is serving a life sentence.

He contributed significantly to screening inmates for participation in the book discussions. I believe his judgements regarding participants for the book discussion were crucial to its success and subsequently to the success of the research study. After the first book discussion session, I noticed that one inmate never returned. During this session, he had questioned me somewhat abruptly about my motives for conducting the book discussion and alluded to the possibility that I might be collecting information to harm them. When I asked co-investigator number one what happened to him, he replied, "Well it was taken care of." I never questioned him again about it.

Several times during our interviews, I noticed that his answers were steered in another direction if they became too personal. It was a struggle at times to elicit information from him. His answers were often based on students in general, rather than his lived experiences. But when he did focus on himself, the data was explosive--it was rich. He is rather self-determined. This observation is based on the fact that he has written books, one of which is an autobiography he is attempting to publish. His talent extends to writing, music, plays, and a self-esteem curriculum that is used within the corrections education department. He also plays the saxophone and cooks dinners on holidays for other inmates. Staff and inmates within the correctional facility respect him and he is very cooperative. His efforts were a major contribution to this research study.

He is a high school and college graduate. I believed that he enjoyed learning, but he indicated that he would have to read something over and again to understand it. In

elementary school he had attended an integrated school. When his family moved to the Midwest, integrated schools were new. He was in junior high and high school during the civil rights movement. He said that he knew that white people did not want him and his African American friends in the school. He often spoke about being physically punished in school.

Co-Investigator Number Two

The second inmate that I met participated in all of the book discussion sessions also. He was a short man with thick glasses and long hair that he kept rolled or braided. A distinguishing characteristic of his was that he constantly washed his hands. Several times after I shook his hand, he would excuse himself to the restroom. I believe that he would wash his hands. If not, he would appear uncomfortable during the interview until the conversation evolved to something of interest, which seemed to take his mind off his hands. His manner of speaking was slow, very slow. He had very little self-confidence.

In elementary school, he indicated that he was a special education student. But in junior high school he was placed in regular classes. It was in junior high school that he decided to quit school because he could not read. Although his mother could read, his father could not read and had quit school for the same reason. He indicated that his father gave him permission to quit school. As I listened to his experiences, I realized that frustrations he experienced in elementary and junior high school mirrored those in his correctional classes.

He only missed one interview. Although it was made up, he apologized many times indicating his desire not to let me down. He had missed the interview because he

had to work. But I learned he was also very depressed that night and did not want to ruin the interview.

Co-Investigator Number Three

Another co-investigator who participated in all of the book discussion sessions was co-investigator number three. He was tall, thin and lanky. He wore his hair cut low and was from a southern state. His sneakers were torn and appeared to be very old; sometimes he apologized for his appearance. His teeth are crooked and bucked and he was in many fights as a child because children made fun of his teeth. This was a memory that still seemed to cause him grief.

His parents divorced when he was in the sixth grade. Afterwards, his mother, sister, and two brothers moved several times. Therefore, he attended three elementary schools. He believed they moved so many times because his mother could not afford housing. Being a new student at school was difficult for him, and other children were not especially nice to him when he was introduced to the class. Bonding with other children was important to him in school. He mainly tried to bond with them on the playground. He indicated that he managed to graduate from high school, but that his classes did not make sense to him. I sensed that his appearance and low socioeconomic status may have caused him to be a type of outcast at school. Even in prison, he seemed as though he did not fit with others.

I had four interviews with him. The first three were not productive because his answers were not coherent most of the time. Toward the beginning of the third interview, he broke down and cried as he told me about his crime. Although his crying made both

of us uncomfortable, his confession placed him more at ease and, thus, improved the quality of the last interview. Because he knew that I was born and raised in Alabama, he questioned how I was able to deal with the culture of the Midwest. I sensed that he had many transitional difficulties when he moved there.

Co-Investigator Number Four

The next to the youngest of the inmates is about twenty-three years old and about six feet tall. A former high school basketball standout, he had a visible habit of sucking his thumb. I suspected that he sucked his thumb because his lips were puckered and sometimes during the interviews he would rub his thumb across his mouth. I never mentioned it to anyone. But one day, co-investigator number one asked me if co-investigator number four had ever sucked his thumb during an interview. He indicated that sometimes during class he would suck his thumb.

Of all the inmates I met at the institution, co-investigator number four was most clearly a kid. He told me that he was preparing to go to college on a partial basketball scholarship when he was stopped and arrested on a drug run to another state. "I knew better" he said. "I just wanted the money for clothes and a new car. Mama was doing the best that she could to keep me in good clothes, but I wanted more. I didn't need anything." When he explained his experiences of being bused from a predominately black school to a predominately white one, he also shared that sometimes when he acted out in class, it was because he was high. He graduated from high school and just a few months later was incarcerated.

He attended every book discussion session. Sometimes he left early to attend

bible study. During the book discussions he was quiet, and it was a struggle to motivate him to participate. During the one-on-one interviews, however, he felt much more comfortable and talked freely. I appreciated his frankness during the interviews.

Co-Investigator Number Five

This young man is about 5'11" tall and wore his hair in a short, curl style. During our first interview, his conversation was completely self-aggrandizing. He managed his image carefully to show that he thought that he was a smooth operator on the street. He spoke with perfect grammar and indicated that he had previously owned several businesses. He still considered himself to be a smooth operator, even in the correctional facility. When I entered the facility, I was required to walk through the visitor's waiting area. Several times, I noticed that he was visited by a different caucasian female.

He had a middle class upbringing and had attended Catholic elementary, junior high, and high schools. His father died when he was in the fifth grade. Watching his mother grieve was devastating for him and he believed that his problems in school started during that year. In fact, he believed that his homeroom teacher was not sensitive to his suffering. In the eleventh grade, he indicated that his mother sent him to a rehabilitation center for smoking marijuana. He did not graduate from high school, but later received a general equivalency diploma (GED).

During our conversations, I was able to tell immediately when he was about to exaggerate because while doing so, he would laugh and smile. At other times, he would drop his head and frown; these were the times he was telling about difficult, painful experiences. For example, he remembered several instances when he was physically

punished in school. He also spoke about the sexual contact initiated by a white, male teacher. These remembrances were no laughing matter.

He had a great deal of respect for his mother. His descriptions informed me that his mother tried everything to provide a good life for her son. They lived in a predominately white neighborhood and he attended a predominately white school. He was well-dressed because he said that a teacher called his mother to tell her that she did not have to send him to school "all dressed up." His mother was still concerned about her son and called him regularly at the prison. Once while I was there, his mother called him at work. Apparently he had not spoken to her in a while, because when he answered the telephone and discovered who it was, he said, "Mu dear!" This is short for mother dear. The phrase expresses deep reverence and love. I smiled because despite his near-perfect grammar, evidence of his cultural language pattern emerged during his excitement of hearing his mother's voice.

On my last visit to the correctional facility, I was told that he had been transferred to another facility. The transfer was not voluntarily. I suspected that he had seriously violated a regulation within the facility, and he had.

Co-Investigator Number Six

The sixth co-investigator was the youngest in the study. He was only 21 years old and was about 6'3" tall and weighed more than 200 pounds. He wore his hair in braids or sometimes platts. Although he did not participate in the book discussion, he was invited to participate in the research study by the educational director. He was a happy-go-lucky person who seemed to do lots of things, like poking, wrestling, or pulling pranks on other

inmates. Everything was always a game to him. Before our first interview I noticed him attempting to persuade a guard to allow him to leave the facility prior to the set time. Another time I noticed him run and snatch a hat from another inmate's head. They began to play as children.

I expected to have difficulty keeping him focused during the interviews and that he would be loud and boisterous. But he was quite different on a one-to-one basis. Our interviews were rich and compelling. He was very focused and serious during the interviews. In fact, one of his comments became the central theme of the lived schooling experiences of all the men in the study.

As a child, he was arrested several times for violating city curfews by hanging out on the boardwalk in Atlantic City, New Jersey. "It was exciting over there," he said. He attended a training school for boys from ages eleven to sixteen. Teachers in the training school for boys taught him and cared about him more than teachers in the public schools he attended. After he left the training school for boys, he was invited to attend a school in another state, and he could have participated on the wrestling team. He decided not to go because he missed his family and wanted to go home. When he attempted to return to a public high school near his home, the principal would not allow him to attend day school. He quit night school after a few weeks because he "could not participate in school activities and it was boring."

He still had a dream of playing professional football. When I indicated that perhaps he should focus on continuing his education and deciding on a career, he said, "I don't know what I want to do."

Co-Investigator Number Seven

One of the four, thirty-something men in the group, he is tall, slim and wore his hair cut short. I found him to be rather straightforward. He passed his GED exam after three months of preparation. He was motivated because after his release, he wanted to be capable of taking care of his daughter. After he received his GED, he enrolled in a computer programming course and was only a few courses shy of his computer programming certificate when the program ended. Despite this disappointment, three weeks before his release several job interviews were confirmed. He was very open about his experiences, and pointed out that he had not been responsible earlier. He credits coming to prison with helping him to settle down and to focus on positive things.

He indicated that he was an average student in school, but did not take school seriously. He lived with his grandmother during junior high school, but moved back home with his mother when he was in the ninth grade. His mother's boyfriend sold marijuana, and his mother and boyfriend allowed him to smoke it and drink beer at home. This was so he would not do so outside of home. He admitted that because of its accessibility, he gave marijuana to his friends at school.

Co-Investigator Number Eight

One of two Muslims in the group, this young man was medium-build and wore his hair cut short. He was seldom seen without a cap. Co-investigator number eight was a high school graduate. While incarcerated, he had taken advantage of the college course offerings. It was while taking those courses and interacting with the African American males who taught them or volunteered in the facility that he began to believe that he

could make something out of his life. He credits prison with helping him to get away from the "craziness." He said, "I haven't seen one person get shot or killed here. At my school and at home, that was an everyday occurrence."

Once in elementary school, he was embarrassed for having dirty hands. From other conversations, I sensed that his parents were not involved in his education and he received very little care and guidance at home. This lack of care included the adult responsibility of assuring that he had clean clothes for school and purchasing items like soap and deodorant for his personal hygiene. He appeared to harbor a great deal of inner rage as a child and acknowledged that he fought a lot. He fought a lot until a principal told him to direct that energy into sports. He then participated on the high school track team that he believes kept him enrolled in school and out of trouble during that time.

During a conversation with my advisor, who visited the prison to meet the coinvestigators, he reminded us that inmates are no longer allowed to participate in the Pell Grant Program. He asked her if she would pursue the possibility of the University offering free credit courses in the facility. He is quite intelligent and was employed as an electrical assistant within the facility. Some of his courses included electrical engineering. During my last visit to the facility, I learned that he had been transferred to work release. Perhaps he has now been released to continue his education and seek employment.

Co-Investigator Number Nine

The last co-investigator is a high school graduate. He is of medium-build and wears his hair processed (term used to describe black men whose hair is permed), but cut

short. He is the other Muslim in the group. His manner of speaking is precise. In fact, during our first interview he was so precise that I believed his responses to have been too well thought out. Sometimes he did not respond directly to my question, but appeared to take his answer in a direction of his choice. Apparently, he was well read regarding the problems affecting African Americans in schools and in society. Toward the end of the first interview, I indicated that I did not wish for him to say what he thought I wanted to hear or to speak exactly from what he had read. I did not use any of his data from the first interview. Rather, I wanted the second and third interviews be a direct response to my questions about his experiences.

Because he had spent his junior high and high school years in a predominately white environment, he had much to say about feeling like an outsider in school. He told me that the white students and teachers always seemed to be working as a team. For example, whatever he said, someone always spoke in contradiction to him and regardless of the other reasons, everyone else sided against him. He had previously attended a predominately black school before his family moved to the Midwest.

Thoughts About the Coinvestigators

Cooperation and respect from the coinvestigators could not have been improved. They were extremely committed to this study. A great deal of personal information was shared about their educational experiences, and they were just as open about their shortcomings.

In their own voices, I heard African American men take responsibility for their actions. I heard them share experiences they had in school and in society more broadly;

many of the experiences reflected uncaring treatment and discrimination. Yet, few of them complained about how others treated them. I noticed their efforts to refrain from the "blame the man" mentality we often associate with inmates. I saw them attempt to maintain a strong way-of-being when they actually wanted to cry. One did shed tears and others' eyes filled with tears as they spoke. Their tears were unnecessary for me to empathize with their pain. Physiological changes such as a lowering of the head, looking away while focusing on nothing, or voice changes indicated to me their embarrassment, shame, and hurt. We can learn from their voices if we are willing. We may learn to be more caring in the process.

Chapter Five

African American Male Inmates' Lived Experiences With Schools

This chapter presents the themes of the educational experiences of the coinvestigators in this study. Descriptions of lived educational experiences of other African American males are woven into the chapter to deepen our understanding. We do not know whether all African American men have had similar experiences, so these themes are not generalizable. However, pondering the experiences presented here can heighten our attentiveness to others' lived experiences in schools.

The research question was: What are the educational experiences of African American male inmates like? The answer to the question is found in the themes which emerged from the interviews with the African American male inmates. The four themes are: (1) we don't like being embarrassed, (2) feelin like I'm on the outside peeping in, (3) we want to be cared about, and (4) they were afraid of us and we were afraid of them. The last section of the chapter presents the main, overarching theme: it just couldn't have been my school. We now turn to the interpretation of the educational experiences of African American male inmates.

We Don't Like Being Embarrassed

The coinvestigators talked about being embarrassed as they described aspects of their educational experiences. Sometimes they were embarrassed by teachers and sometimes they felt embarrassed because they did not know what they seemingly should have learned. When teachers embarrassed them, the teachers would single them out, make a big deal about their predicament.

One coinvestigator believed that the classroom embarrassment may have motivated him. He said,

> The teacher would call me over to his desk and ask me, "Why don't you know the answer to this question, how come you are not prepared at all?" I would tell him, "I just didn't get it" or give some old feeble excuse. I probably didn't. No I just didn't take the time to prepare. I think this particular teacher knew that I had the potential; that may be why he called on me . . . When I did prepare myself and I came up to the board and I had the answer he didn't seem that surprised. When I look back on that, I look at it as a positive experience. Even though I was embarrassed, I think that the embarrassment turned into a positive conclusion. Because it did let me know that if I did prepare, I could cope with the class.

When asked if he would advocate embarrassment as a motivator, he said:

> I think that it is kind of a personal thing--it wouldn't work for everybody. Now my oldest son, he would probably be embarrassed to the extent that he would not want to come back. I think that it is just the difference between people. In my experience when I think back on teachers, the better teachers that I had dealt with everybody as individuals as opposed to trying to deal with everybody as the same.

Even though this coinvestigator thought embarrassment could be helpful to some, other coinvestigators were clear they did not like to be embarrassed by teachers. One said, "I didn't like teachers who were strict and purposely embarrassed you. Sometimes it pushes you to do better, but sometimes you just gave up." The term "purposely" conveys that the teachers were fully aware of their actions. When teachers acted

purposefully, they were seen as intentionally attempting to embarrass him. The effect on this coinvestigator was to discourage him; he "just gave up."

Sometimes teachers singled out students to embarrass them. Another coinvestigator said, "I did not like a teacher who always singled me out." Being "singled out" meant being selected from the group, distinguished from other students, picked on more often than other students by the teacher. Is being singled out about being under increased scrutiny? If one is "always" being singled out, is one being carefully selected because of an undesirable trait? If one comes to expect to being singled out, being in the classroom is changed, different for this student.

Not only were coinvestigators intentionally singled out for embarrassment, but ordinary--and unpleasant--bodily functions were the cause of embarrassment. Being sick and throwing up is embarrassing to children, but throwing up in class and having a teacher draw attention to it was worse. One coinvestigator said, "I threw up in the classroom. Mr. Casey made a big deal out of it. He went and got Mr. Bord [another teacher] and the janitor. It was very embarrassing for me. I went home and didn't come to school for two days."

Throwing up in the classroom causes public embarrassment because of the loss of control of the body and the stench that inevitably ensues. As he was dealing with this embarrassment, he was also embarrassed by the teacher making a big deal out of it. The teacher blew things out of proportion by doing and saying things unnecessarily. More adults were called to the classroom.

Miller (1996) defines embarrassment as a complex emotion which is made up of several components and aspects, the salience of which necessitates the individual making appraisals of a social event and the physiological and behavioral consequences of that event. In appraising the event, self-presentational difficulties and a concern with social rules are central issues. Embarrassment has to do with a failure to present a desired image to others whom we think will make some judgement about us. Miller continues to explain that embarrassment generally does not carry moral implications as does shame; it refers to accidents or goofs.

When we connect the experience of throwing up at school with Miller's definition of embarrassment, we see that it was an accident. The coinvestigator's illness prevented him from controlling his bodily functions and he vomited foul smelling liquids from his body. Therefore the experience of throwing up, especially at school, is an accident. Having friends is important for children, and the coinvestigator did not want his peers to judge him negatively. The coinvestigator was embarrassed because his image, to his friends, would be tarnished.

Another occurrence of embarrassment involved children getting dirty on the playground. Active boys are bound to get dirty in the course of their normal play. Indeed, can active boys play without getting dirty? According to one coinvestigator, "After playing outside, we would get punished for having dirty hands, and would have to stand at the back of the classroom. The other children would laugh and tease me. I would be hurt and embarrassed."

The memory of the other children laughing at and teasing him appeared to be echoing as he talked. He was reliving this unpleasant experience. Though usually confident, this coinvestigator displayed some physiological responses to embarrassment that included dropping his head, briefly frowning, and placing his hands over his chin, appearing as though he did not quite know what to do with them. I sensed that he was attempting to stay cool to maintain his image of a strong black man, even though he was hurting.

Why a teacher would punish a child for having dirty hands is perplexing. The students with dirty hands were separated and confined far from the teachers, just as today the same coinvestigator is separated and confined in prison. The separation could have been interpreted to mean that he was so bad and dirty that he had to be "removed from society" (Kohn, 1996). Being separated and standing in the back of the room, he and his friends with dirty hands were singled out for ridicule. He was an object of laughing and teasing. This is the experience of being embarrassed and hurt at school.

The stories of these coinvestigators improve our understanding of ways teachers cause embarrassment through seemingly small issues like singling students out, overreacting to a sick child who throws up, and punishing a student with dirty hands. Most importantly, they alert us to the impact teachers' actions has on students.

Also contributing to coinvestigators' embarrassment were learning disabilities and not knowing what they were expected to know in school. Not knowing the words of the pledge of allegiance to the American flag was devastating for one coinvestigator. He said, "In elementary school we would recite the pledge to the flag. I never got the words

right. I didn't like that." His memory of the experience visibly bothered him. As he dropped his head, his facial expression appeared anguished. I felt his pain during this conversation, and I felt sorry for him. The image of him as a man in prison shifted to the little boy watching helplessly as everyone else recited the pledge comfortably. "It wasn't his fault," I thought.

He also spoke about being embarrassed because he constantly needed help from the teacher. He could not cope with the work. He continued, "It was difficult and embarrassing because I was always asking the teacher to come give me help. All of the other kids were just doing it on their own and stuff like that." According the him, he attempted to hide his embarrassment by acting out in class. He was a class clown and sometimes picked on the teachers as he tried to cope with the class work. For him, acting out became a facade to avoid embarrassment and to project an image that everything was all right with him. Goffman (1955) refers to this facade as a face saving strategy. In offering an explanation for his acting out, the coinvestigator told me that,

> I didn't like school, so I tried to cover up for dealing with the problem of not reading and getting embarrassed. School did not appeal to me because I felt different from the other kids. I worried about doing the wrong thing, getting laughed at, and being embarrassed.

For another coinvestigator, the fear of being embarrassed kept him from taking a college entrance exam. He said,

> Mama always told me that if I ever wanted to go to college, she would do all that she could to help me. I didn't want to take an entrance exam because I thought I was too dumb to pass it. I was embarrassed to even try.

His fear of being embarrassed became a barrier to learning. He continued,

> I knew some straight A students, and I knew that I couldn't measure up to these kids. They could sit down and thumb through a book in five minutes and get an A for the semester. I had to read the book from cover to cover and would do good to get a C minus, because my comprehension and attention span was real bad. That affected my self-image.

In these two examples, we see a child and a youth who receded into themselves and protected themselves from embarrassment. They covered up their deficits and refused to try to learn to avoid embarrassment.

Covering up and hiding is associated with shame. Sometimes embarrassment and shame are used interchangeably, and sometimes shame is seen as an extension of embarrassment (Lynd, 1958; Miller, 1996). Shame was a deeper sense of embarrassment that was experienced by some of the coinvestigators.

When I asked the coinvestigator who was sent to the back of the classroom for having dirty hands what he would tell educators regarding what he felt, he remarked,

> I think that when you try to point out something bad about a person, I think that as a human being we don't like to hear anything bad about ourselves. That sort of insults the person or makes him feel shame, and some of us react different ways when we feel shame.

We learn that for this coinvestigator, shame produced some sort of "different" reaction for him. Could this different reaction have been acting out? We also learned that his shame was caused by being told something bad about himself.

Although they spoke in terms of embarrassment most of the time, I detected shame in the coinvestigator who stayed home for two days after throwing up and the coinvestigator who could not recite the pledge of allegiance to the American flag. Understanding these lived experiences can be enhanced by an awareness of three main points about shame: how shame is defined, how it is associated with other terms, and the impact of shame.

Shame is an emotion caused by embarrassment, unworthiness, or disgrace (American Heritage College Dictionary, 1993). Shame is overwhelming. Feelings of shame may lead to feelings of inferiority. Shame may be synonymous with embarrassment (Lynd, 1958; Miller, 1996), but shame hurts more deeply. Shame affects the psyche. We may avoid acknowledging shame--its hard to say out loud, "I feel ashamed of myself." It's painful.

Children associate shame with embarrassment, ridicule, feeling stupid, and being incapable of doing things right (Ferguson, Stegge, and Damhuis, 1991). Feeling shame is also associated with not measuring up (Wong, 1992). Wong believes that males tend to make an effort to elude feelings of shame. This is particularly important to understand about African American males because their conceptions of manhood (Hunter and Davis, 1994) include dignity.

Personal experience has taught me that a significant impact of shame is the loss of dignity and having one's spirit broken. Shame is devoid of power. To render oneself powerless is like being subhuman and being subhuman is like living without power. Living without power and being subhuman violates one's human worth. Richard Wright (1940) eloquently described the depth of shame when the character in Native Son, Bigger said, "I felt drenched in shame, naked to my soul" (p. 212). The coinvestigator who was embarrassed by the teacher when he "threw up" in the classroom, stayed home for two days because home was a place of safety. School was the place where he felt the shame, and it was so powerful that he stayed away.

In Nigger, Dick Gregory (1964) shared his experiences with shame in school. His experiences in school bear a close resemblance with the coinvestigator who stayed home for two days. Gregory said, "I never learned hate at home, or shame. I had to go to school for that" (p. 43). His story represented a world of shame, of being soaked in shame. Being introduced to shame heightened the awareness of shame in all other aspects of his life. Shame was about feeling different, and suddenly that difference was seen everywhere. He wrote,

> I had almost three dollars in dimes and quarters in my pocket. I stuck my hand in my pocket and held onto the money, waiting for her to call my name. But the teacher closed her book after she called everybody else in the class. I stood up and raised my hand. "What is it now?" You forgot me. She turned toward the blackboard. "I don't have time to be playing with you, Richard." "My Daddy said he'd . . ." "Sit down, Richard, you're disturbing the class." "My Daddy said

> he'd give . . . fifteen dollars." She turned around and looked mad. "We are collecting this money for you and your kind, Richard Gregory. If your Daddy can give fifteen dollars you have no business being on relief." "I got it right now, I got it right now, my Daddy gave it to me to turn in today, my Daddy said . . . " "And furthermore," she said, looking right at me, her nostrils getting big and her lips getting thin and her eyes opening wide. "We know you don't have a Daddy." (p. 45)

Gregory's teacher made sure that everyone knew that he was on welfare and that he didn't have a daddy. Her shaming him publicly in front of the class was a turning point.

> And I always thought the teacher kind of liked me. She always picked me to wash the blackboard on Friday, after school. That was a big thrill, it made me feel important. If I didn't wash it, come Monday the school might not function right. I walked out of school that day, and for a long time I didn't go back very often. There was shame there. (p. 45)

We see these African American males--Dick Gregory and the coinvestigator--being shamed at school and their subsequent avoidance of school because of it. The significance of their experiences is that the place which was to provide learning, hope, guidance, and better opportunities is the place they fled. Perhaps they were hiding from individuals who witnessed their shame. The impact of shame lingers in the memories of these adults.

In the theme, "we don't like to be embarrassed," the coinvestigators teach us that attending school means living the experience of embarrassment. When teachers embarrassed them, the teachers would single them out, make a big deal about their being sick, or punish them for getting their hands dirty. When they had not learned what they seemingly should have known, they felt embarrassed. While the coinvestigators told about embarrassment, we see the shadow of shame. Avoiding embarrassment is a normal reaction for all of us. "We don't like to be embarrassed" expresses a lived educational experience of nine African American male inmates.

Feelin' Like I'm on the Outside Peeping in

The testimonies from the coinvestigators revealed that they felt very little involvement in their educational experiences, like they were outsiders. These feelings were based on several episodes. One coinvestigator's family moved frequently and thus, he was a new student several times. Another coinvestigator had a low reading level and felt that he was a burden on the teachers. Two other coinvestigators felt that they were in somebody else's school, and another felt that the teachers distanced themselves in the classroom. The theme, "feeling like I'm on the outside peeping in" informs us of the coinvestigators' concerns about male bonding, being on the outside, and their being in a different world. Regardless of the specific episode, they felt like outsiders at school.

Male Bonding

For some of the coinvestigators, not feeling connected to their school increased the need for bonding with other African American males. They were thrust into the arms of those with whom they could connect. When asked how he would get to know other students

or make himself feel part of the school, one coinvestigator said that to get to know each other, the boys would play fight during recess. He believed that sometimes the teachers must have thought that they hated each other, but according to him, that was something little boys do: play rough. "We would be bonding. Wrestling, clocking, everything was going on out there in that school yard." Clocking is a jumbled combination of karate and fighting. Playing and bonding were a part of his way of being in the world. In another interview, he indicated that even in prison, he still gets in trouble for playing.

> They were sending me to the hole for stupid stuff. Like playing. Like me and this small white guy was playing. He hit me and ran, right? And I ran after him back in the cottage, right? But, I didn't see him in there or nothing. You know it was like nothing. And then count time came and they came to his room and came to my room and got us and took us to the hole and said we was fighting. I mean this little guy, they said I was fighting this real little guy . . . We were just playing--it was just playing.

To teachers and prison guards rough play seems to mean fighting, and to these men it seems to mean male bonding. The concept of male bonding through play is also illustrated by Charles Ogletree's experiences at Harvard University. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) writes,

> The Black Plague--a black law school students' 'rough touch' football team--offered much more than a workout. 'There was a strong sense of kinship. . . It was a source of identity. . . an inner circle of strength. . . important male bonding.' Alone, each of the brothers felt isolated and vulnerable; together they felt invincible. (p. 640-641)

Another coinvestigator told about bonding taking place during recess. He said, "As a new student, I would mainly try to build relationships during recess. That is where the bond come in as far as everyone knowing each other." Bonding through play at recess helped him to connect with a few other students. Because he felt like an outsider in the school, the only connection he felt came from getting to know others through play. Recess was vital to the bonding because only then were the boys free to be together and to wrestle, clock, and "rough touch." They seized the opportunity to connect to with other.

This coinvestigator frequently used the phrase "keeping it real" which refers to the importance of maintaining a strong African American identity which may carry different meanings according to one's socioeconomic status or belief system. The phrase can refer to staying African American in a predominately white context. The coinvestigator did not feel connected to the school and even the African American teachers because they were not real in his opinion; they acted fake, not like themselves. African Americans have various phrases to describe how one should be one's self. The phrase, "putting on airs," refers to a pretense, such as switching ways of speaking or acting in the presence of someone else. Another phrase, "stay black," carries the same meaning as "keeping it real." The coinvestigator who introduced the phrase in our conversation, felt strongly that neither the African American teachers in his school nor the African American inmates and employees at the correctional facility were keeping it real. When teachers and students at school did not keep it real, he had difficulty connecting with his school.

Bonding on the playground meant maintaining their identity and keeping it real. Orlando Bagwell, a successful African American male documentary film maker interviewed

by Lawrence-Lightfoot, (1994) associated the rough play on the playground with surviving in the real world. Lawrence-Lightfoot writes,

> On the playground--a large fenced-in concrete lot--the gender segregation was maintained with "the girls just standing around talking" while "the boys got into the fight thing." Orlando describes the male scene: "It was all about turf. Everyone is protecting his own. . . everyone is playing it. It is a violent and dangerous world." The violence would often be channeled into games. In one game, called North Against the South, boys would line up on either side of the playground, and at the signal they would charge at each other at top speed, shoving, pushing, kicking, banging each other down, pressing their bodies into the hard cement. The boys would return from recess scraped, bruised, and bleeding. "Why didn't the teachers intervene?" I ask. Orlando laughs -- "They had enough sense not to risk life and limb trying to break this stuff up." For the Bagwell boys and their cousins, the playground held special dangers. Not only did they have to watchout for the male 'turf thing'; they also knew that their blackness made them particularly vulnerable to attacks. "My brother and I were covering our backs all the time." (p. 528-529)

We see African American boys playing rough at school, an African American man playing rough in prison, and African American men playing rough at law school. Rough play helps them bond, maintain their identity, and keep it real, inside a school where they otherwise felt like they did not belong.

Being on the Outside

Relying on conventional wisdom, one would expect that participating in school activities would be one way to increase feelings of connection to a school. But for one coinvestigator, it did not help. According to him, "I did not feel any connection at school even though I participated in band." The same coinvestigator feels unrelated to programs in the correctional facility. He said, "I do not feel any connection with the educational programs here in prison . . . they [teachers and other inmates] are not real."

Another coinvestigator believed that he had no involvement in making decisions about the courses he should take while he was in high school. He said,

> They [teachers] should ask what is it that you want, as opposed to somebody making decisions behind closed doors. You've got to include these people and integrate what they want in order to have them to want to come to school. They just told me this is the class and here it is.

Not being included in the selection of his coursework excluded him from school in some ways. He sensed no school ownership and, hence, he was an outsider.

In I've Known Rivers, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) writes about Orlando Bagwell as he painfully watched his friends and himself become estranged from education by the lack of choices. Bagwell said

> This feels alien, frightening . . . . You walk into class and you are not on your territory. They decide what you should learn and how you should do it . . . . You feel excluded from those decisions, rendered inadequate. (p. 557)

One coinvestigator said attending a predominately white school made him feel like an outsider:

> I was for the most part educated in Detroit and Minnesota. Ah, Detroit was an environment where there were many more African American kids. When we came to Minnesota that was quite different. Back in the sixties, I don't think that the big migration of numbers came, black people came until the late seventies or early eighties. Back in those days, the class rooms were predominately European or Caucasian. There were maybe like three African Americans, and we felt like it was them and us. Certain things that--for example, if I had a confrontation with one of the white kids. I could be right, my perspective or my argument could be more right . . . they would take sides. You have this majority number who took sides against the minority. And you felt like no matter what my opinion is, I'm not gonna be heard today. And they would begin to create barriers.

When asked what those barriers were, he responded:

> They would be like ah, just like silent bars. You know what I mean? Invisible bars, silent barriers. No matter what you would do, you wouldn't fit in there. No matter how hard you try, you're not with us and we're not with you--therefore ain't nothing happin' here. You would feel alienated.

Like Dick Gregory (1964) who left school after he was shamed, and the coinvestigator who left school after he was embarrassed, we see two more African American males describing experiences which distanced them from school. One is a coinvestigator in this study, the other a successful film maker. Both the coinvestigator and Bagwell used the word

alienated to describe a particular aspect of their educational experience. When one feels alienated, one is isolated, alone, not attached. Like the coinvestigator who was isolated from the rest of the class for having dirty hands, Bagwell felt distanced and removed. He said, "What hurt more than the outbursts of violence was the chronic feeling of being 'on the outside,' excluded and distanced from 'the center of things" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994, p. 524). Lawrence-Lightfoot continued quoting Bagwell, "I was the only black kid in the second grade. I went through the whole year barely talking to anyone, fearful and uncomfortable" (p. 522). As noted above, one of the coinvestigators used the phrase, "You wouldn't fit in, no matter how hard you try." We can see that he spent time and effort attempting to gain access.

Because he was always getting into trouble with his cousins and brothers, one coinvestigator's mother removed him from a predominately black school and enrolled him in an Hispanic school across town. Once there, he was getting into trouble again for fighting. As one of the few African American males in the school, he was without his cousins and brothers which meant that he had no one to watch his back. He was all alone in the new school, and he remembers his unhappiness. His troubles increased as a result of that experience. He said,

> I think I should have been sent to a school that had black people. Because I just heard all good stuff about those schools. And it seem like those kids that was going to [old school] cause that was a black school, it seem like they actually wanted to go to school. I didn't want to go to school. I did not want to go to no school--back then. But it just seem like the people at [old school] were having just so much fun. I just

> didn't feel as though I was being reached there [at the Hispanic school]. I know [said with emphasis] I wasn't being reached in that school! Because when somethin' reach me, you know what I'm saying, I feel as though I wanna do it. You know, I wanna finish it and it drives me to do it . . . You know? I mean they never reached me. They never reached me at that school.

Even though one school was predominately black and the other predominately Hispanic, I asked if he could be more specific about the differences. He said,

> I don't know. I mean maybe that school would have been alright if I was a Spanish kid, but you know I figure that them people that was in that school was reaching Spanish people a little bit better and the people in the black school was reaching the black kids a little bit better. I mean it had nothing really to do with being prejudice or nothing. But it would have to be that.

He felt black teachers related better to black kids, and Hispanic teachers relate better to Hispanic kids. When asked if he felt different as a black kid in that Hispanic school, he said,

> I felt as though I belonged to that other school [black school], but I was just in that school to keep me separated [from my brother and cousins]. You know, why else would I be going to that school when that other school was closer to my house? It was closer to my school. My brother went to that school, my sisters went to that school. You know, why do I gotta go all the way to the other end of Atlantic City to go to school? [pause]. Even that, ok, if they didn't want to put me in that school, why did I have to go to a Puerto Rican school when I could have went to another black school? It was another black school around there.

He felt different and compared his siblings' school experiences and his own. He felt like an outsider over a period of time. In reflection, how he came to feel like an outsider in his school is understandable. In a follow-up interview, I reminded him that he had previously indicated that his brother, sisters, and cousins appeared to be enjoying their school, the black school, but he really wasn't enjoying his educational experiences. When asked how he came to believe that they enjoyed school, he said, "They wasn't getting suspended and stuff like I was." I asked him if they were doing better in school, and he said, "It seemed that way. They ain't never got left back. My brother, I don't think he ever got suspended." I asked him if his brothers did the same things in school as he did which got him into trouble. He said, "I don't think the same things was happening to them. I mean I think they was just getting in trouble with me like after school." So they seemed not to get in trouble at school.

As an explanation for his problems in school, he indicated that he was reacting to problems related to being in an Hispanic school. But when I asked him why he thought those things were happening to him, he said,

> I don't know, I just figured that they was like, that I was the bad guy. That's what everybody was like pointing it to, like I was the bad one like out of everybody else. I was always into something, so I was always out there fighting and somein' like that.

When asked what was causing the fights, he answered, "I wasn't startin' the fights. It wasn't like I was the oldest person in the school. Like something would happen out in the yard and I would just fight. I mean it was, some of the times the kids was bigger than me. I would still fight."

Later, I asked him why he thought that the Hispanic school was their school? He said, "Cause it was in the Spanish part of town, had Spanish teachers, and most of all the kids was Spanish. The principal was Spanish." Then I asked, "Why do you think the African American school was their school?" He said, "Basically it was like all African American students with African American principal, teachers, and stuff like that." The school's songs seemed to be distinguishing features:

> They had a corny song over there at that [Hispanic] school. It was corny. I know it just wasn't better than my cousin's and them . . . . Their school song was cold [real cool], and ours was like corny. Our graduation song was this song by Annie. That was our graduation song [said sarcastically] . . . our school song talked about a brave man in Spain and stuff like that.

His feelings about the song reveal his being an outsider.

Another coinvestigator felt different from other students because his reading level was very low and he could not comprehend as qūickly as the others. He said,

> You just feel like you different from everybody else, you just <u>different</u> from them because it's like they got these skills and qualities and stuff and you don't got em. It's like you just don't fit in. There is somewhere where I fit it. I'm just gonna find out where I fit it and instead of just saying I'm go' try to fit in, I just gotta ask them [teachers] for the help and let them know what I need. And if they willing to give me that, I can try to fit it right here. I would usually try to find something easy.

I asked, "What would that be like? Where would you fit in? He said, "Most likely with the guys that were skipping class, or go out to the mall or something, hang like that."

As an outsider, a great deal of time is spent attempting to gain access. As one attempts to gain access, feelings of rejection are supreme, because in the process, the self is lost (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994). Feeling like an outsider in school was evident when the coinvestigator spoke about sensing that their school was someone else's territory, being one of few African Americans in school, being considered as the bad guy, and being aware that you can't learn like others.

It Was a Different World

One coinvestigator attended a predominantly black high school, called East High School, near his home until it was closed as a part of the desegregation of schools in his city. The students at East High School were separated and sent to two suburban, all white schools miles away from their neighborhood. He smiled as he talked, but he appeared to have a great deal of resentment toward the district for closing his school and sending him to a different world. This transfer was not only a significant change in schooling for him, but also a critical change (Polite, 1994) in the make up of his new school, Bilford High School. The racial composition of Bilford was dramatically affected by busing this coinvestigator and his friends out there. He did not feel connected to the school because he believed that the teachers and students in his new school did not want the black students to be a part of it. When asked what could have helped him to feel connected, he frowned as he said, "Nothing would have helped. I couldn't stand that school!" He continued, "I didn't like most of the teachers because they seemed uppity like they were better than me. Their attitude was arrogant. The whole school was." I asked him what the teachers did to appear arrogant or uppity. He said,

> It's just the way they used to talk and say things. Their vocabulary was different from the teachers at East. The teachers at East would sit down and talk to you on the same level that you were at. At Bilford they would use these big ole vocabulary words and say stuff like, 'Mr. Low, you are so and so and so.' Sometimes it made me feel awkward, but most of the times I wasn't trying to hear what they were saying.

I asked him how teachers at East talked to him. He said, "Teachers at East were saying, 'You need to shape up or ship out.' They were direct." The difference in the way black and white teachers communicate with students, is an example of culturally influenced oral interactions (Delpit, 1988). Many African American teachers and parents pose explicit directives such as you need to shape up or ship out. According to Delpit (1988), white teachers are more likely to give "veiled directives," which may be more difficult to interpret.

Yearnings for a more welcoming environment was felt by the coinvestigator who was transferred to Bilford. He experienced a great loss of the bond with others in the close-knit relationships in his former school. He left an environment that was welcoming and entered Bilford High School which was cold and distant. When describing the teachers at East High, he said, "The teachers related better to you because the teachers lived in the same neighborhood with you. Bilford was way out surrounded by suburbs and big ole houses and things like that." In his new school, teachers were more formal. According to Bowser (1991) there is a need to drop the formality with some students and take a personal interest in their lives and work with them. He believes that an effective and motivating relationship begins when that happens.

Looking back, this 23-year-old coinvestigator reflected on the great differences between his neighborhood and that surrounding his new school. Being forced to integrate into a new school brought about a new level of awareness about differences between black people and white people. He said,

> The white kids had benzes [Mercedes] and everything in school. The school district separated our school in halves. We were torn up. This was very different. I used to say every time I was going to school "these white people getting paid." I think that's when I first started seeing a difference between our neighborhood and their neighborhood. I got a good look at it then. I think that's when I knew there was racism, but going to Bilford set it off.

The coinvestigator's described two schools which reflected two cultures. There are two points to be noted here. First, most African Americans see a contradiction between the way they are treated and caucasians' belief in justice and equality. Even Myrdal (1944) found that the nation's beliefs in justice and equality was a direct contradiction to the way white people treated African Americans. The second point is made by Hacker (1992). He discusses the black and the white world in America in Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal; he states that blacks and whites see things differently and they are treated differently. The coinvestigator who was bused to the suburban school became aware of the two worlds through his own lived experiences. Awareness of the two worlds increased his awareness of differences, of feeling different, of feeling like an outsider at school.

In Native Son (1940), the character Bigger experienced being an outsider too. Like the coinvestigator on the school bus, Bigger also knew that there were differences between himself and white people. He said,

> Them white boys sure can fly, Gus said. Yeah, Bigger said, wistfully. They get a chance to do everything . . . . I could fly one of them things if I had a chance, Bigger mumbled reflectively, as though talking to himself . . . . I could fly a plane if I had a chance, Bigger said. If you wasn't black and if you had some money and if they'd let you got to that aviation school, you could fly a plane, Gus said. For a moment Bigger contemplated all the 'ifs' that Gus had mentioned. Then both boys broke into hard laughter, looking at each other through squinted eyes. When their laughter subsided, Bigger said in a voice that was half-question and half-statement: It's funny how the white folks treat us, ain't it? . . . We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain't. They do things and we can't. It' just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I'm on the outside of the world peeping in through a know-hole in the fence. . . (p. 14-17).

We can understand Bigger's recognition of the differences between blacks and whites. Likewise, we can visualize the coinvestigator riding on the school bus, peeping through the window, feeling like he was in a different world while noticing the large houses and expensive cars en route to school. As Bigger analyzed the differences, he said that he felt like he was in jail. Is this how the coinvestigator felt as he was bused to the new school and as he noticed the "big ole' houses" and teenagers driving "benzes?" Like Bigger, did he feel a sense of confinement? If so, is this how school should feel?

The school experiences of African American male inmates, disclose a "feelin like I'm on the outside peeping in." The testimonies from the coinvestigators informed us that they felt very little involvement in their educational experiences. We learned about male bonding--how it is manifested in rough play and why it is important to African American males. In spite of their efforts to bond with each other, they remained on the outside. We saw young African American males who felt like school was a different world. They felt like outsiders when they didn't relate culturally to their schools or when they fell behind academically. One coinvestigator felt like an outsider because even African American teachers were not keeping it real. The coinvestigators felt like they were on the outside peeping into someone else's school.

We Want to be Cared About

When the coinvestigators were asked to describe the teachers that they did or did not like and specific situations that made them feel good in school, caring emerged as a theme. We see in their experiences some of the teachers were caring. Caring teachers were described as those who provided guidance, who disciplined with concern, who had high expectations of them, were attentive to them, were patient with them, were nice and supportive, and who provided praise.

We also see in their experiences that some teachers really did not care. Uncaring teachers embarrassed them, did not provide positive comments, offered no support, allowed them to sleep in class, or only cared about them because of their athletic ability. Finally, uncaring teachers were also those who pushed them through classes because they were disciplinary problems, and who used corporal punishment. Caring represents a significant

theme since students' self-esteem and self-worth are influenced by teacher interactions (Deiro, 1994). Students may believe that teachers are uncaring when they intentionally embarrass them (Martin, 1987). Effective teachers are aware of the importance of caring, and reflecting on caring can alter a teacher's pedagogy (Webb and Blond, 1995).

Some of the Teachers Were Caring

In their article, Youth and Caring, Chaskin and Rauner (1995) reported on youth programs that focused on caring. One such program, the Research Program on Youth and Caring, developed the following definition. They wrote that caring,

> involves the ways in which individuals and institutions protect young people and invest in their ongoing development. It also involves the ways in which young people, in turn, protect the rights and interest of others and ultimately support the ongoing development of their social and civic communities. (p. 671-672)

In another definition of caring, Bosworth (1995) reported that as teens discussed characteristics of caring, they saw caring as "an integral part of relationships within their circle of intimate friends and family members, as well as in their school, their community, and the rest of the world" (p. 687). Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden's (1995) conceptualize it as a value. They wrote, "Caring is a value. Morally and culturally, caring is a belief about how we should view and interact with others" (p. 680). Most significantly, caring means that we help others grow and reach their full potential, according to Mayeroff, (1971). Mayeroff further contends that the major ingredients of caring include: knowing, patience, honesty, trust, humility, hope, and courage. These ingredients were evident in the voices of the coinvestigators when they discussed the extent to which teachers cared about them.

The coinvestigators gave many examples of guidance they received from teachers, and in the guidance we see teachers who cared for them. One coinvestigator with a history of severe truancy was eventually sent to a training school for boys where he found educational guidance. According to him, "The teachers at the training school were more caring, fun, and creative than they were in the public schools. The coach really pushed me." Another coinvestigator remarked, "Mr. Pointer dressed sharp like we did. He would make learning applicable to life, to what we were experiencing. He made us understand why we wanted to stay in school."

Most of the coinvestigators indicated that they appreciated discipline, care, and guidance from their teachers. One coinvestigator said, "they didn't just report bad things, but used discipline and care toward me. They visited my home regularly and laughed with my mom." Another coinvestigator commented on the guidance he received from a teacher who extended himself to help him: "One teacher, a man, tried to help out by building a relationship with my family. He pushed me to do what was right." Another coinvestigator admired his principal's respect and guidance. He said, "My elementary school principal was like Ida B. Wells - strong, respected, classy. She took some classes to Washington, D.C. She taught us how to use silverware properly."

Following a fight in high school, a coinvestigator's high school principal guided him to put his energy into sports instead of expelling him. He said,

> My first fight in high school changed my life because instead of suspending or expelling me, the principal encouraged me to put that energy in sports. I started

running track, my grades were good, and I graduated from there. I had no additional fights.

Another way guidance was experienced was through teachers helping them to set goals which is an important aspect of academic achievement and life success. The coinvestigator believed that by helping them to set goals, teachers demonstrated belief in them and in their ability to succeed. According to one coinvestigator, "I liked teachers who were always trying to get you to plan a career."

Yet, another coinvestigator indicated that guidance was demonstrated by the teachers when they believed in his sincerity in wanting to succeed. In the correctional facility the educational program is geared toward returning individuals to the community with employable skills. According to one coinvestigator, "There is a concern for caring. If you want to know, you can get the help. They have that humbleness and you can feel the genuine in them and that they don't want anything from you."

Believing that teachers in the correctional facility believed in him increased his desire to change his life. He said,

> They just want you to be the best that you can be. That really helped me to want to change my life around. The Education Coordinator can be nice and real harsh. If you are trying, she is in your corner. She has the desire, willingness, humbleness to want you to do something for yourself. There are people here who will give you the help.

As another ingredient of caring, attention, was seen by two coinvestigators who commented that they liked teachers who took time with them. When this occurred, they believed that the teachers were genuinely concerned about them. According to one

coinvestigator, "My gym instructor [a white man] was the only teacher who appeared to be interested in me." Another coinvestigator was more direct about wanting attention, "I liked teachers who were attentive to me."

Some coinvestigators described teachers who were patient with them. One coinvestigator who continues to struggle to improve his reading, expressed appreciation for the patience that some teachers and tutors have demonstrated toward him. He said,

> They were really good people. I think it would be frustrating trying to teach someone something that is really hard for them to learn. You steady [sic] have to keep going over and over it with them to get them to get it. I think it would be frustrating for them. I don't think I could do it.

His comments revealed that the teacher covered the material over and over again. He acknowledged his belief that repeating information for a slow learner would be frustrating for the teachers. Their patience with him lead him to believe that they were good people. However, this level of patience is difficult and can not be taught in teacher preparation courses; patience can be learned through actual teaching (Paschke, (1996). This coinvestigator especially appreciated the one-on-one tutoring. He said, "One-on-one they are right there and they keep going over it with you. They would write it down right there and give it to you."

Persevering is difficult when it is perceived that a teacher does not support your best interests. For one coinvestigator, having a teacher in a correctional class to support him made a big difference. He said,

> Once I quit the computer class for a week because I could not get along with the new class assistant. The regular teacher wasn't there that week. I accepted another job [within the correctional facility], but I called the teacher the next week. He congratulated me but said, 'let me tell you one thing, don't ever let anyone stop you from getting an education.' He allowed me to come back to school. That support changed the whole outlook on my life.

The coinvestigators had strong memories of their caring teachers. The nice teachers were easy to remember: "I liked teachers who treated me nice," said one coinvestigator. Another said, "I liked Mrs. Billie because she was nice, helped me with my homework, showed concern and compassion. She was encouraging and gave me hope."

When asked to uncover his most pleasant memory of school, one coinvestigator smiled as he recalled the praise one teacher gave him about his class project:

> He [teacher] was talking about Africa one day. He referred to it as the dark continent. Not because of the color of the people, but because little was known about it. And I said I know plenty about it. And he said, 'All right, go for what you know.' So, he assigned us term projects . . . when I got done, I was so proud. I took it to class and showed it . . . When I finished it, the class gave me an applause. My teacher liked it so much, he kept it and showed it to other teachers and classes.

The coinvestigator told about many incidents of teachers caring for them. However, not all of their teachers cared.

Some Teachers Really Didn't Care

The coinvestigators felt many of their teachers really did not care about them. The teachers' lack of care was disclosed in their lack of positive comments to the students, by pushing them through the grades even though they were not learning, and in their corporal punishment of the students. We note that not caring meant omission of providing what students needed as well as commission of school sanctioned violence against them.

When asked to describe his teachers, one coinvestigator said, "I think my attitude was like they really don't care. They are just here to collect their paycheck every two weeks or what not." In a later interview, he indicated his frustration with classes at the correctional facility and related his school experiences with prison. He told me:

> Basically that's the same thing that is going on in this program. When you here, they don't care. But when you lay in or something they call like they concerned about you--which I know it's all about making themselves look good. They not really out to do nothing for me. I'm trying to do it for myself, but I need help. They pretending like they want to help, but they don't. They just trying to make themselves look good to keep their funding or whatever.

Dick Gregory imagined a caring teacher which contrasts with the uncaring teacher he experienced in everyday life. By noting the caring teacher of his imagination, we better understand what a teacher who does not care is like. We do not see evidence of positive comments in Dick Gregory's (1964) poignant story of a schoolteacher he conceived in his imagination:

> I made up a schoolteacher that loved me, that taught me to read. A teacher that didn't put me in the idiot's seat or talk about you and your kind. She didn't yell at me when I came to school with my homework all wrinkled and damp. She understood when I told her it was too cold to study in the kitchen so I did my homework under the covers with a flashlight. Then I fell asleep. And one of the other five kids in bed must have peed on it. (p. 21-22)

Another coinvestigator, told about a teacher who did not provide positive comments which was important to him. He said, "For me, positive comments did not come from most teachers. That was abusive. Anytime an adult says something positive, it can enhance a child's ability." Positive comments coming from teachers is a crucial aspect of academic achievement, and the lack of positive comments was viewed as uncaring and unsupporting by these men. When they were young students, they wanted to hear positive comments. Too often, their teachers were silent; they failed to speak words of encouragement which made them seem not to care.

The lack of care was also demonstrated by teachers allowing them to sleep. One coinvestigator revealed that he would sometimes sleep in class and he noted that the teachers did not say anything. He had a vivid memory of how that made him feel.

> They don't mind as long as I'm in the classroom and not bothering anybody. That's pretty much how it was. When I wouldn't show up for class, they would call home, but when I did show up for class, I was just back there sleeping.

When I asked him how it made him feel for teachers to leave him alone while he slept, he stated,

> I think it gave me more encouragement to give up. I said to myself, "Well see, they don't care so why should I care?" Instead of thinking about this is something I need, so I should care and try to ask them for the help that I need.

In school and in prison, he indicated that the teachers did not care for him while he was in class. It is simple to understand why this recurring theme in his life would lead to a frustration that would eventually cause him to drop out of school.

During these conversations, one coinvestigator said he believed that teachers were only interested in receiving a paycheck. Another believed that the lack of positive comments from teachers were abusive and another indicated that teachers allowed him to sleep in class. These actions by the teachers demonstrated to the coinvestigator that they did not care. But, there were other reasons coinvestigators gave for believing teachers did not care about them. Coinvestigators in this study were pushed through school without learning much of the intended curriculum.

Being pushed through school meant that one coinvestigator had not done the schoolwork, but teachers promoted him. Although he was eventually sent to a reform school for boys and admitted that he was always in trouble in school, he strongly believed that he was promoted because he was bad.

> I don't see how I was passing. I must have been doing the work. But, I just really don't remember doing enough to pass. I always passed and I've never got left back, but I just don't see how I was passing. Because, I never really felt as though they were teaching me anything.

As he spoke to me, I noticed that his facial expression changed to reveal frustration and concern.

> In elementary school, I was always getting suspended. I just felt as though I was a real bad kid, but I was always passing. I never got left back. That's what kind of surprised me. If I was so bad and I wasn't doing the work why didn't I never get left back? Then I started figuring that I was just so bad that they were letting me pass to get me out of their class.

Another indicated that he attended school, but was not engaged in classroom discussions. He also sold drugs and played sports his senior year. He said teachers "pushed me through because I was an all-star athlete. They did not press the issue about my work and stuff. At the time, I thought it was cool."

These comments inform us that they were aware that they were being pushed through for reasons other than academic achievement. Although their teachers may have felt sorry for them or made allowances for the athlete's hectic schedule, the teacher's passivity was seen as uncaring. The experience of being pushed through discloses uncaring teachers.

So far, the uncaring ways of teachers reflect what they did not do. Teachers were not engaged with them, not present to them. The ommission of action silently said, "I don't care about you." There was another way the teachers actively communicated their lack of care--corporal punishment. The actions of one coinvestigator illustrate a relationship between corporal punishment and aggressive behavior. A teacher had hit him. He said,

> He slapped me up so badly, when school was over, I went home and got my pellet gun. I was going to shoot him with it. I waited for him after school, but he never came out. Some of the students had told him. The principal questioned me about it.

Although we would condemn his having a pellet gun at school, we see his reaction tied to the teacher's action. In the slapping, we see the action of an uncaring teacher. In so far as the principal did not prevent the slapping, we note an uncaring principal as well.

All but two of the coinvestigators attended public schools, and they attended Catholic schools. One in his early thirties who had attended a Catholic school indicated that the worse part of school for him was his recollection of the physical abuse he experienced at the hands of teachers. He said, "They had a Sister Benevolent. She was treacherous. She was the quickest woman that I had ever seen. She would beat a person with her hand. She would slap and punch people." Explaining how another teacher in the Catholic school treated his friend, he continued, "Mr. Lonnie had thrown a desk with my friend in it and he went home and told his father. Nothing ever happened."

The second coinvestigator who attended Catholic schools informed me that corporal punishment did not work for him.

> Sister Mary Basey, nobody liked her, not even the other sisters. She was just a mean woman. She was the one that gave the corporal punishment. Corporal punishment doesn't work, but it sure hurts. Every-other-day or so, I was getting spanked on the hand with the ruler.

African American males' experiences with corporal punishment in schools is well documented. Opponents of corporal punishment feel that African American males are unfairly physically punished in schools (Richardson and Evans, 1994). Minorities overall are more likely to be physically punished than non-minorities for the same offenses (Harper and Epstein, 1989; Sanson, Prior, Smart, & Oberklaid, 1993; Slate, Perez, Waldrop & Justen, 1991; Zoccolillo, 1993). Even principals agree that minorities receive more corporal punishment in school than non-minorities (Reynolds, 1990). How can children feel cared for by those who strike them?

Instead of guiding students to learn how to act and to care about others, Kohn (1996) believes that our use of punishment encourages them to focus on the consequence they will suffer if they do something bad. When students are only concerned about the consequences of doing something wrong, corporal punishment hinders their ability to move to the next level of moral development. Although punishment may change the behavior in the short term, the motives and values of students will not be positively influenced. Acceptable behavior is not learned through punishment (Harwig and Ruesch, 1994). Instead a new set of problems may be created.

Advocates of corporal punishment do not fully understand the harm it may cause children who are physically punished. The impact of severe corporal punishment increases the likelihood of aggressive behavior (Kandel, 1991). In addition, using force on children teaches them that aggression is acceptable (Strauss, 1994). A significant majority of criminals were regularly punished as children (Gordon, 1989).

Coinvestigators described caring teachers as attentive, patient, encouraging and as providing praise and guidance to them. Uncaring teachers did not provide positive comments, allowed them to sleep in class, pushed them through because of their behavior or their athletic ability, or inflicted physical punishment upon them. The coinvestigators, like all of us, wanted to be cared about.

They Were Afraid Of Us and We Were Afraid Of Them

Using mirrors as a metaphor can help us understand the theme, "they were afraid of us and we were afraid of them." Two mirrors facing each other bounce an image back and forth. Fear in school was like that for the coinvestigators. They believed that teachers and students were afraid of them, and the coinvestigators were afraid of the teachers.

Fear was sometimes used instrumentally by coinvestigators. One coinvestigator used fear to deflect attention away from his academic deficiencies. He stated:

> In my early childhood I was like ah, the bully of the classroom. I would pick on people to try to get their attention. They were scared. That was a long time ago. . . . My biggest fear was worrying about what everybody would think of me when they knew that I couldn't read or spell. That was my biggest fear. I tried to hide that as much as I could by doing something else. Getting on someone else, getting something stirred up.

Two fears are evident here. The coinvestigator was afraid of being devalued so he made other people afraid of him.

In the following passages, we see the reflection of teachers who felt fearful from their interactions with African American males. On the other side, we see the reflection of African American males who felt fearful.

Teachers Were Afraid of Us

The coinvestigators who had been students at predominately white schools were aware that some teachers who maintained greater distance from them were afraid of them. But fearful teachers were not limited to the predominately white schools. One coinvestigator reported a teacher in a predominately black school feared him:

> As I look back, I saw a fear from the teachers, as though they were saying, "I wonder if this fool will try to do something to me as I am writing on the board. If I get too close to him, will he try to rip me off or try to do something to me." That fear was like a protection against people. Even though they were nice, they tried to keep you at a certain distance. I can remember their fear. This is how I perceived them as I look back.

Fear in the classroom diminishes the possibilities for constructive student-teacher relationships, and it may result in varying outcomes. Poor student-teacher relationships, for example, negatively affect self-concept (Testeman, 1996). The awareness that someone is afraid of you can stimulate fear in yourself because of the uncertainty of the other persons' actions.

According to one coinvestigator, the teachers' fear resulted in his leaving school. He said,

> A lot of times I think that they were afraid of me. Most of the time when I would get to acting up they would tell me to leave the class, and that is what I wanted to do in the first place. I wanted to have a reason, well they told me to leave, so I left.

He seemed to know how to manipulate the teacher's fear of him to escape from school.

We Were Afraid of Some of the Teachers

According to one coinvestigator, "The teachers at the white school were scary." He indicated that he tried to look tough and not be affected by them, but that he was also afraid. When asked why he was afraid of them, he was unable to describe it. Because he knew that they were afraid of him, he was afraid of what they would do to him. He seemed to sense the teachers' fear which in turn made him fearful.

I too have become afraid of people who were afraid of me. My 12 year-old son and I walked into a fast-food restaurant in Wisconsin and everyone began to stare at us. Unaware of their reasons for staring, I assumed that they found the braids in my hair interesting. While standing in line, I noticed that the stares increased. My son sensed it too. He moved closer to me, as though he was afraid. I too began to feel scared, but I was afraid to leave. When we finally reached the front of the line, which had been a long wait, an elderly white man stepped in front of us. He smiled as he glared into my face, but the smile wasn't friendly. The cashier immediately began to take his order. My son quietly said to me, "That is not fair." When the cashier took our order, she was obviously shaken and scared. She was talking fast and placing the order in the computer fast. I ordered curly fries, but quickly. She took my money quickly and placed the change on

the counter quickly. The cashier hurried to bag the order. It wasn't right. "Excuse me, I ordered curly fries, not french fries," I said. She grabbed the bag and exchanged the fries quickly. At that point I was terrified for our safety. The cashier actually threw the bag of food across the counter as if to hurry us out. Finally, I noticed that we were the only African Americans in the building. The walk back to the door and to the car seemed to take hours. Once in the car, I felt sick and terrified. I tired to make sense of what had just happened. "They treated us like that because we are black," my son said.

This is an example of preexisting social conditions about race that caused the spiral of increasing fear. Such conditions also impact classroom relationships. One coinvestigator talked about preexisting negative feelings he experienced in school. "I think that white teachers and I already had negative feelings about each other. That may have made matters worse." He acknowledged that both he and the teacher were already suspicious of each other. Later he said, "I got along ok with white teachers, but I did not feel comfortable with them."

As a new student in a predominately white university, Dr. James Comer (1988) shared his experience of being humiliated in a restaurant because of preexisting societal conditions. He said,

> I sat down at the counter and took a look at the menu. When I looked up, the owner was standing over me with his arm pointed toward the door, meaning "out." They didn't serve blacks. I was stunned. It took me a few seconds to comprehend. And then the anger seemed to move up from my legs through my body and threatened to explode in my head. I looked around for help. Nobody

> said anything. The man next to me looked straight ahead, motionless, silent. Totally humiliated and furious, I somehow moved through the door and stood on the sidewalk in front, looking back inside. I was helpless, devastated. I wanted to pick up a rock and smash the window of that sweetshop. I stumbled back to the dormitory and, in the quiet of my room, I cried. Welcome to Indiana University. (p. 154-55)

Pre-existing conditions fomented fear among white teachers and students and African American students when two schools were desegregated. One coinvestigator talked about the fear he noticed on his first day at the predominately white school. He said,

> When we first got there, everybody was real edgy and scary looking. White dudes, they were leaving school early and white girls leaving with them, teachers acting all shaky and stuff like that. They were afraid of us. It was predominately white before East [the high school attended previously] closed.

He explained,

> We added fuel to the fire. Just acting up, gang banging, talking loud, pushing and shoving, slapping white boys in the back of their head. Dudes starting gambling with white dudes and taking their money. Brothers got to dating white girls. It was messed up. We just came to the conclusion that they were not used to blacks at their school. We were not used to white people. We had some white students there (East High School), but they were cool. The white students at Bilford would call us nigger sometimes.

Fear is an emotion that impacts various aspects of our lives. For example, Overstreet (1951) believed that racial and religious prejudice is sometimes expressed through fear. The impact of the burden of having others fear oneself has been widely experienced by African American males, but has not been studied to great extent. We know little about how the burden of fear impacts academic achievement and the mental and emotional stability of African American male children.

Stereotypes about African American males may be responsible for many of the existing fears regarding them. However, as we learned from the coinvestigators in this study, fear is contagious. Like images in opposing mirrors, fear reflects or bounces off one person to another. Fear then become a continuing spiral.

It Just Couldn't Have Been My School

The research question which framed this project was: What are the school experiences of African American male inmates like? The essential themes give a partial answer to this question. One main over arching theme was disclosed in the text, and we turn to it.

I read and pondered the themes for a central idea (Orbe, 1993). The idea was to represent the essence of how the coinvestigators experienced their schooling. The primary theme embedded in all the schooling experiences they related seemed to be: "It just couldn't have been my school."

This phrase was used by one coinvestigator as he sought to describe his experiences at a predominately Hispanic elementary school. His mother had removed him from a predominately black school and sent him to the new school. He indicated that

he was constantly having to defend himself from Hispanic students and, therefore, was always in trouble.

The word just in "it just couldn't have been my school" lets us know the strength of his feeling about not belonging there. "Just" communicates his inability to describe further how he felt; "just" signifies finality. The text clearly points to the coinvestigator' feeling like they did not belong to the school, and the school did not belong to them.

The first theme is "we don't like to be embarrassed." Embarrassment in school decreases the school's purpose as a place of growth and development and diminishes one's sense of self. One can never truly feel a part of a school if he feel embarrassed there.

The second theme, "Feelin' like I'm on the outside peeping in," signifies that the school couldn't be one's own. If you're "on the outside peeping in" at the school, then you are not a part of the school. Being on the outside looking in makes two locations vivid: the location on the inside and the location where you are standing.

The third theme is "we want to be cared about." All students want and need to feel they are cared about at school. If a student consistently experiences uncaring, he may begin to sense he is not welcomed. A normal response to feeling unwelcome is to leave, to retreat, to withdraw into oneself, or to feel that one is not wanted. School then becomes their school--not ours, not mine.

The fourth theme, "they were afraid of us and we were afraid of them," expresses the fear that they noticed others felt for them and reveals their own fear and mistrust. Both white and black teachers seemed to fear the coinvestigators and some teachers kept

their distance from them. White students seemed edgy when two schools were integrated. The coinvestigators feared others who might act unpredictable because of their fear of them. At times, the coinvestigators used fear to their advantage as when one provoked a teacher who sent him home and another who figuratively added fuel to the fire by acting up, shoving and slapping white boys on the back of their heads. As long as the coinvestigators were feared and were fearful, they could not be comfortable in the school. They could not be at home there. If one is fearful, then we see why he says, "It just couldn't have been my school."

I see the four themes woven together producing the central theme. These five themes represent the descriptions of the coinvestigators's lived educational experiences. The coinvestigator who was transferred from a black school to a Hispanic school captured the essence of the lived educational experiences of the coinvestigator in one of his comments. When attempting to describe how the two schools were different he said, "It is not so much as different, but I just knew that this couldn't have been my school. You know it just couldn't have been my school."

Chapter Six

Lessons Learned and Reflections

The purpose of this study was to capture the lived educational experiences of nine African American male inmates. Phenomenological research does not pose recommendations for practice. Rather, the reader is invited to extract their own lessons. I have reflected on the research I conducted, and this chapter presents my ideas about two main points that emerged. Those two points are: what I learned from the inmates and questions and issues that I think need additional research.

What I Learned From Coinvestigators

Whose School Is It?

The central theme, it just couldn't have been my school, was a major surprise for me. I was surprised because I had assumed that the coinvestigators would be engaged in activities in their schools and that they, for the most part, enjoy going to school. Another reason why the central theme was a surprise to me is because I saw a connection between the central theme and what I wrote about in chapter one: the disproportionate numbers of African American males in the wrong categories like school expulsions, corporal punishment, special education, low academic achievement, juvenile delinquency, homicide, arrest rates (juvenile and adults), and suicide.

As I reflected on the startling statistics in chapter one of this dissertation that illustrate the disproportionate numbers of African American males who dropout, who are suspended or expelled, or who are pushed out of school, I saw a connection with the central theme. Feeling disassociated from school would be rather appropriate if one

experiences suspension and expulsion. If certain students do not feel that the school is theirs, then whose school is it? As I began to ponder this question, I reflected on words used during the interviews that provided clues that the inmates did not feel apart of their school. Words such as "they" and "their" could have been "we" and "our." More of the latter would have reflected an increase in their ownership of the schools they attended. In chapter five, I related Dick Gregory's experience of feeling important to his teacher and in his class because he washed the board every Friday. He must have felt a sense of responsibility for helping making the school run well. However, when he was embarrassed by the teacher, he left school only to return sporadically. A co-investigator explained that teachers in his high school made all the decisions about the courses he should take instead of including him in the selection process. Being included was important to him. In the second grade Orlando Bagwell, the filmmaker, was fearful and uncomfortable and hardly talked to anyone for an entire year of school. One co-investigator talked about not being reached in the Hispanic school. He felt that he belonged to another school. He felt as though since everyone treated him as if he were the bad guy, he was always in trouble and was suspended repeatedly. What can we learn from these testimonies? If students are suspended, shamed, isolated, excluded from decisions about classes they take, they are unlikely to feel ownership of the school they attend. It's not their school.

So whose school is it? Is it the principal's school or the teacher's school? The Hispanic children's? The children who do well academically? If so, how did that come to be? When students visualize their school, of what do they think? Is it the building,

other students, teachers or principal that they visualize? When a student is angry and states, "I will never go back to that school!" of whom or what is the student thinking?

Which students feel that they do not belong to their school? Do students feel that they do not belong because they feel mistreated by school officials? Who would admit mistreating the children and are students actually mistreated? The inmates in this study and findings from other studies taught me that mistreatment in schools mirrors mistreatment in other parts of society. The inmates in this study taught me that their experiences in schools reflect the possibility that some teachers viewed them as inferior, worthless, and dangerous just as others in society may. Perhaps, these stereotypes cause those in power to unconsciously sort out which children belong in a school.

Some other points are important to me about a school being a child's school: ownership in a school, listening to African American males differently, and African American males may feel excluded from school.

Ownership in a School Is Important

I believe that a child feeling ownership in a school will significantly reduce episodes of suspensions, expulsions, and corporal punishment in school. To illustrate this point, we can consider how children value their favorite toys and teenagers value their clothes and shoes. To modify behavior, parents sometimes spank children or refuse to allow them to play with their favorite toy. Sometimes, removing the toy is more effective because children value their toys and their toys are special to them. In addition, children protect their favorite toys from other children. Likewise, teenagers take pride in their

sneakers and their clothes. Appearance is important to them and having cool sneakers is a reflection of who they are. We understand that children value what is important to them because those items are protected. Children are excited about new toys and teenagers are excited about new clothes and sneakers; they take pride in their ownership and property. Likewise, students can value and take ownership in their school. School should also be an exciting and rewarding time in their lives and should not be filled with negative memories.

School ownership may take varied forms, but everyone in the school could be responsible for it. Students will be happy to accept ownership in their school if they are treated as though they are wanted and welcomed by other students, staff, teachers, and administrators. I believe that when students know that they are working toward wonderful, worthwhile opportunities and feel wanted in the school, they will take ownership of their school. If students are made to feel unwanted, they feel they are on the outside of the school. When students feel on the outside, neither the school property nor others in the school are important to them. Everything on the inside becomes something or someone to work against as it works against outsiders. It is important that students take ownership in their school. This can be accomplished if they believe that they are special, that they belong in the school, and that despite their differences from other students, they have something to contribute to the school.

Listening Differently to African American Males Is Important

In chapter one it was noted that each day 444 African American youth between the ages of 16 and 24 drop out of school, 1, 198 are corporally punished, and 4,404 are

suspended (Children's Defense Fund, 1996). African American males account for a disproportionately high number of those students. I believe that allowing them to have a voice regarding their school experiences is important for African American males. Perhaps we will learn that many of them feel like outsiders in their own school. Since the intent is to have good schools and to provide opportunities for our children to become productive adults, listening to what they have to say about their educational experiences is important.

In our efforts to improve the educational experiences of African American males, we must learn to listen to them differently. We must listen with our hearts as well as with our ears. We must improve our knowledge of the conditions in which African American males live and must survive in society. We must make ourselves aware of existing stereotypes about African American males and ways in which we may perpetuate them.

How do we listen to African American males better? Listening well requires more than just fine tuning our ears to them. Listening requires us to consider everything about them and to listen with care and concern. If we are interested in improving the way we listen to African American males, we can ask ourselves key questions. What do they disclose? What do they not disclose? How do they disclose themselves? How do they respond to who we disclose ourselves to be? And, how do we help to make them comfortable with us and how do we become comfortable with them? We can listen to who they are and how they talk to us, and to each other. My brothers, cousins, and nephews laugh and talk a lot. Quite often, it seems like they are competing to be heard. Everything is a joke, and to live happily around them, one must have a sense of humor. If

one were to observe our family gatherings, they would see lively and sometimes loud conversations. This aspect of our family gathering is part of our family culture. I see other young African American males acting similarly. Although such lively and sometimes loud, spirited conversations are not appropriate for all settings, especially the classroom, but understanding this aspect of their culture is important. I am reminded of an African American female, graduate student who was substituting in a school and was told that the African American and Latino males in the class were terrible and are often sent to the office for their actions. She informed us that in her opinion, they were not that bad because they acted like her African American brothers and cousins. When she wanted them to settle down she told them to and they cooperated (Shaw, 1996).

Most importantly, we must understand that African American males are not monolithic as they are stereotyped to be. Each is different; they are unique individuals. If we provide them with more opportunities to talk to us, we will learn that each is unique. We can learn this through listening to them in the classroom and through additional research studies.

Feeling Excluded From School Leads to Negative Consequences

We think of school as a place for learning, opportunity, and personal growth. This research has taught me that many African American males may feel excluded from school. How is it that school is such a negative place for them? Why is it that a disproportionate number of them leave school--potentially a place for learning, opportunity, and personal growth-- and continue to experience negative consequences outside of school?

School for them is almost like a survival camp. It is a hurdle for them to jump over and if they do not jump high enough, there are severe consequences for them. These consequences include being out of school and being wide-open to the violence in the streets and the negative stereotypes with which they are confronted in the larger society. Another consequence may be the inability to obtain employment or to pursue higher education opportunities. An unfortunate consequence for a disproportionate number of African American males is subsequent incarceration. Following incarceration a host of other problems are likely.

Attempting to cope with feelings of exclusion were evident in this research. I have also learned that in educational settings, male bonding is an important aspect of the lives of African American males and may be a response to feeling unconnected to the school. Interviews with the inmates and stories from the literature about successful African American males informed me that rough play such as wrestling on the playground is part of the bonding process. As a female educator, I admit that my concern is for their safety and if I were responsible for children on the playground, I would not allow them to hurt each other. But, I have also realized that as females, our protective instinct may have caused us to place too many restrictions on boys. Perhaps, we want them to be passive in the classroom, to sit quietly as mannequins would. Do stereotypes of African American males cause male educators to treat them differently? Do educators contribute to their feeling excluded by suspensions for episodes of male bonding which may be framed to as fighting by teachers? Through the experiences of the inmates, I have learned that educators must ask questions such as these to help African American males

feel included in their schools. Through this research I have learned that school could become a more welcoming place for them so that they will learn to value and enjoy education and sense that the school they attend is their school.

The Need for Additional Research

Research is a search for knowledge. More research is necessary to improve our understanding of how to work with African American males. When combined with other studies, the uniqueness (Orbe, 1993) of the African American male experience is enhanced and will produce even greater understanding. The uniqueness of the lived educational experiences of African American males is too vast to understand in one study. Throughout the writing of this dissertation, many more issues and questions about the lived educational experiences of African American occurred to me.

Providing Voice to Diverse African American Males

Questions from peers about this study indicated they were concerned that it would be pathologically focused. They believed so because of their contention that African American male inmates would probably have juvenile delinquency histories and thus were probably problem students in schools. A common question was, "Why don't you interview successful African American males instead?" They believed the study would reinforce negative stereotypes. But they were unaware of the stance of phenomenological research. Phenomenological research is a caring process which seeks to bring forth the individual's meanings of their everyday lived experiences.

Interviewing different African American males is necessary. I support the continuation of providing voice to successful African American males regarding their

educational experiences. But we must remember the diversity of African American males because they are not monolithic as society views them to be. Giving voice to African American males of all walks of life would provide greater insight and may offer strategies for success that would be useful as we work with other African American males.

Rather than talk only to men whose educational experiences are in the past, providing opportunities for students to describe their experiences while still in school would be helpful. A supportive environment and trust of the interviewer are central to obtaining rich testimonies from children and youth. We might commission a mosaic of studies that focus on young African American males' experiences in schools. Perhaps a study within schools that would allow even kindergarten boys to tell us what school is like might disclose these young boys are already experiencing challenges in school. I think this because a friend told me that on the second day of kindergarten, his five-year-old son was sent to timeout because he twice gave correct answers. The teacher felt that he answered when he was not called on and separated him from the class as punishment. This story suggests that even African American male children in kindergarten can tell us much about school experiences.

In another episode, an African American male in the fourth grade was always cited as disruptive in the classroom. His mother eventually removed him from the school and enrolled him in a magnet school. His disruptive behavior ceased and he became an honor roll student that school year. Perhaps a study may identify other situations involving African American males cited as disruptive and solutions to their dilemmas that will improve their academic pursuits and the school environment. A mosaic of studies

would therefore include elementary, junior high, and high school students. A more elaborate mosaic of studies would include public, private, charter and alternative schools.

Describing African American Males' Experiences with Work

Schooling isn't experienced in a vacuum. We expect children to leave school and become adults who take an important roles in the workplace. What are some experiences of African American males that lessen their chances to succeed in the workforce? How do those experiences affect them in the community and the family? Though these questions do not address education specifically, they can help us learn more about their experiences so that we can work with them in educational settings and prepare them for the workforce.

In one of my interviews, one co-investigator discussed work-related issues that occurred while he was in high school. Another discussed problems associated with working in the correctional facility. He said,

> Black men are being placed in the lower skilled jobs like the yard crew. If you take a tour through this building, . . . you would see that there are more people in skilled positions of noncolor than there are of color. That's not really indicative of the skills of the African American people in this institution. There are a lot of intelligent brothers here. Unfortunately they are not getting jobs . . . If we are lacking confidence because of experiences that we encounter here, what is our chance of getting out there and getting in positions where we can be successful? Cause we're go' be perpetuating the same type of minds that we are forming here. I try to make it a point personally to go after goals that may even

seem difficult to obtain while I'm in here because I want to build up my confidence that I can do it.

Are other African American males outside prison experiencing such issues? A phenomenological inquiry into their experiences would provide insight as we prepare them for the workforce. Perhaps their experiences have caused them additional concerns about employment. Discussions with some coinvestigators revealed that they were concerned about their economic and social status upon leaving the correctional facility. Upon release, they would still be jobless and absent from the workforce. They expressed concern about not having the necessary skills and level of education necessary to be qualified for 21st century employment.

Their concerns about employment would be met with additional challenges. For example, they would have criminal records and may be attracted to coping financially through illegal means. In addition, they will face racial and cultural impediments. As a result, given the disproportionate number of incarcerated African American males, we are likely to continue to see increasing rates of poverty and income differentials. Discrimination in the world of work (The Job Crisis for Black Youth, 1971; Pettigrew, 1973) continues to be a concern as we approach the 21st century.

Describing Experiences Outside School That May Impact Their Academic Achievement

Another important issue revealed in this study are the experiences and influences outside school that made significant impact on these coinvestigators. Since these factors were external to school, they were not included as a theme of educational experience. However, a label for these outside influences could be "too much of the craziness." The

term, the craziness, used by one co-investigator, referenced the influences of drugs, gang activity, girls, family disfunctionality, and juvenile delinquency. He said, "I haven't seen one person get shot or killed here. At my school and at home, that was an everyday occurrence." Another co-investigator indicated his concerns about returning to the streets.

> The main thing that's been on my mind lately is going home. Wondering how that's gonna be. I know it's not gonna be easy. I know it's way harder out there now than it was seven or eight years ago. It's so much negativity around.

The Public Schools as a Criminal Tracking System for African American Males

Kunjufu (1983), believes that public schools contribute to the destruction of African American boys. Kozol (1991) believes that the use of handcuffs in school is better preparation for African American males than they realize, because 90% of the male inmates of the jails in New York City are dropouts of the public schools.

I observed young black males in my own community be suspended from, pushed-out of or dropout of school only later to become involved in the correctional system. This study indicates that the coinvestigators experienced situations in school (fear, uncaring, embarrassment, disconnection) that many may expect to exist within a place like a prison. Do the public schools create a criminal tracking system for some students?

Educational Experiences of African American Females

Many friends and colleagues questioned why I did not include African American females in the study. My main concern was that African American males were considered an endangered specie and were incarcerated in disproportionally high

numbers. Overtime, I have become more aware of the unique problems faced by African American girls in schools. Unfortunately, the number of African American females being suspended from school and being incarcerated has now reached disproportionately high numbers as well. A separate mosaic of studies would provide insight into the unique educational experiences of African American females.

Females face discrimination because of their gender. Their struggles in school may be similar in some ways to those of African American males. Just as the intersection of race and gender makes schooling complex for African American males, so it does for African American females. Take for example a young woman who was sexually abused at home and has difficulty working in close proximity with male teachers. Her method of dealing with being uncomfortable with male teachers is to act out in class. Many educators believe that teachers are only responsible for teaching the class and they believe that if she acts out in class, she should be removed or punished. Her plight alerts us to the fact that there are experiences of females which we should study separately from males.

All Students Should Feel That the School Is Their School

Ultimately, the school should value all students and help them become contributing members of society. If we value them, we will provide them with opportunities to become responsible family members, employees, and citizens. Some of the tools they will need include critical thinking, flexibility when dealing with change, and confidence in their creative talents. Additional tools include technological literacy, good communication skills and solid analytical and synthesizing abilities. Another tool is the ability to make decisions based on different levels of information. They will also

benefit from the ability to transfer knowledge from one setting to another as well as to deal with conflicting viewpoints. They need an educational environment that is challenging and that encourages them to seek higher educational or technical educational opportunities that will assist them in their competition in the workforce and subsequently their careers. Of course, this cannot happen if students feel that the school they attend is not their school.

African American males will have a sense of belonging in their schools if they believe that the education they are receiving will offer them a positive, bright future. They will be encouraged by teachers and students' high expectations for them. We can express our expectations for them by building on their strengths instead of punishing them for their weaknesses. We can also give them opportunities and responsibilities. Dick Gregory believed that his elementary school could not function properly if he did not wash the blackboard in his classroom. He felt important because of his responsibility, and he believed that his teacher saw him as important.

African American males will have a sense of belonging in their schools if we surround them with care. We can frame who they are and what they do in the most positive images consistent with reality (Noddings, 1984). We can extend ourselves to see the best in them and signal to them that we believe they belong. School should feel as comfortable and welcoming as a good home.

African Americans males will have a sense of belonging in their school if they have an opportunity to bond with other African American males. Even some African American males at Harvard University Law School felt the need to bond with each other.

Does this suggest that we need to become more tolerant of their rough play and provide opportunities for them to bond in school? How can we foster a sense of connectedness to each other, the school, and the community among them?

Students need to feel like insiders in their schools. They do not wish to stand on the outside looking in. Students desire to feel that they belong to the school and that the school is their school.

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